SEW FAST SEW EASY

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW WHEN
YOU START TO SEW

ELISSA K. MEYRICH

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by

Elissa K. Meyrich

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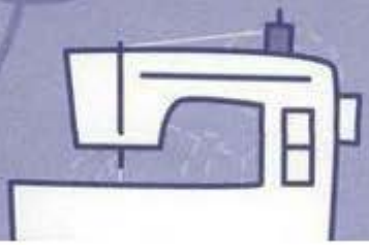

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Acknowledgments

I want to thank all the students I've had. They were my inspiration to write this book, which makes sewing fast and easy to learn in our busy lives. Thank you, Mrs. Goldberg, my next-door neighbor, who, when I was a child, encouraged all my curiosity about sewing, knitting, and crocheting. Thank you to my dearest friends, Martha Weissberg, Janice Harrison, and Dominic Harris, who challenged me by saying "No one needs another sewing book." Carl Raymond, whose expert guidance on the book and its presentation was priceless. Dorsey Mills, who saw my vision. Georgia Rucker, for her brilliant artistic hand both on the book and on the Web site. Deborah Green, who helped organize my book, and Liz Rourke, who helped edit the book with the eyes of a beginner sewer. Julia Pastore, my editor at St. Martin's Press, who got the book into its final shape and without whom this book never would have been the very best guide to sewing for beginners. Thanks to my agent, Susan Protter, who carried me through some tough times. And many thanks to the gals who work and teach in my place—they keep me in touch with our customer base and their needs while learning to sew. Thank you, Mom, for all your support.

Introduction

Ever looked in a clothing store window and thought *you* could do that? Ever wanted to experiment with some fabric and create a design entirely your own? Ever wanted to just be able to sew your own hems? If you've ever wanted to try your hand at sewing, this is the book for you. Having taught sewing for more than fifteen years, I know all the fears and frustrations of the first-time sewer—and how to solve them. Covering all of the basics, from supplies to fabrics and patterns, this step-by-step workbook will have you sewing in no time—without fuddy-duddy, time-consuming techniques.

For me, sewing has always been a form of creative expression. I remember my first sewing machine—a tiny Singer that operated by hand. I spent hours happily dressing my dolls in my own creations. A designer was born! After attending Parsons School of Design, I worked for twenty-nine years as a designer in New York's garment district, even owning my own sportswear company for a time. Working with expert pattern cutters, drapers, and sample makers taught me the easiest, most efficient ways to make any sewing project. I've used those methods in classes at my Sew Fast Sew Easy shop to help hundreds experience the joys of sewing.

Students always ask me to recommend a sewing guide and I draw a blank. Too many guides contain outdated photographs, confusing directions, and are just plain boring. The *Sew Fast Sew Easy* workbook is my attempt to change all of that. With clear and easy-to-follow directions and illustrations, you'll learn everything you need to know to sew most projects. Plus, you'll have the directions and patterns necessary to create three of my favorites: an envelope pillow cover, a tote bag, and a skirt.

Once you have the ground rules down pat, it just takes practice, patience, and time to develop your skills. You'll make lots of mistakes, but that's the only way to learn. I often say to students, "If I give you a pair of ballet toe shoes, could you go on point right away?" Give it a chance, and I know you'll find the benefits of sewing irresistible. Not only does it build confidence and self-esteem, but using your hands and your mind to create something will relax you. My greatest joy in life is being able to express myself through this craft of sewing. I hope it will be the same for you.

How to Use This Book

The first five chapters will familiarize you with the tools, terms, and techniques you'll be using. Read these chapters carefully, but don't worry if everything doesn't make complete sense the first time around; it will become clearer as you actually begin to make a project. I suggest making the items in the order they appear in the workbook. You'll appreciate the practice of making a pillow cover and a tote bag before moving on to the skirt.

Before you begin, always make sure you have on hand all the supplies you'll need. Being well prepared will save you lots of time. Also, be sure to read through the entire assembly method. Familiarize yourself with the process, look up any terms you don't know in the glossary, and flip back to earlier chapters to refresh your memory, if necessary. Always review the cutting rules before beginning a project.

Then, take your time and follow the assembly step-by-step. Look at the accompanying illustrations for clarification. Resist the urge to jump ahead, skip steps, or jumble the procedure. Move on only after you've fully completed a step. Don't be afraid to redo a step if it hasn't turned out quite right. And, most of all, relax and have fun.

Now, let's get started!

Chapter 1

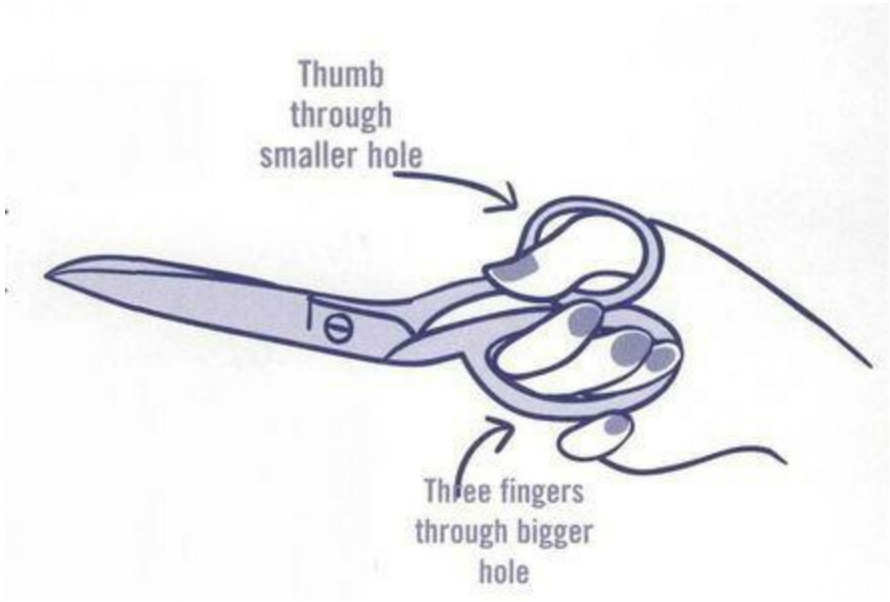
Your Survival Sewing Kit:

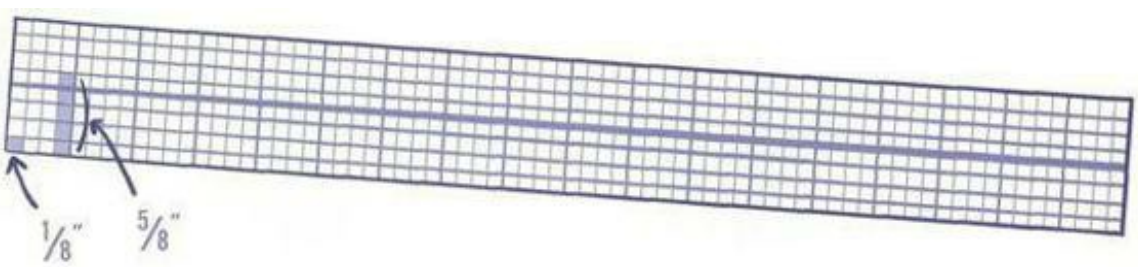
WHAT YOU NEED TO GET STARTED

Tools of the Trade

With these supplies—or notions as they are frequently called—on hand, you'll be able to complete most sewing projects. You should be able to find all the items in any sewing or craft store.

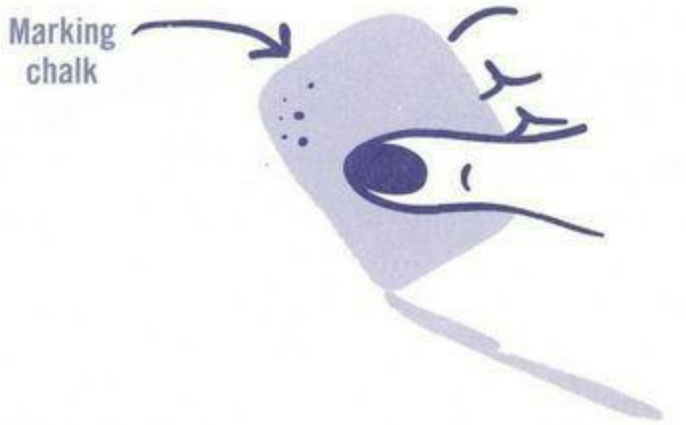
Scissors, an 8- to 10-inch pair.
The best kind is all metal. They will cut fabric easily and will last much longer. Remember that scissors are an extension of your own hand and are a very important tool. They must remain sharp—there is nothing more frustrating than dull scissors (don't use them to cut paper—just fabric!). The handles of the scissors are designed for you to hold them a certain way. This will help you to cut better. The longer oblong opening is for you to insert the first three fingers of your hand and the circular hole is for your thumb.



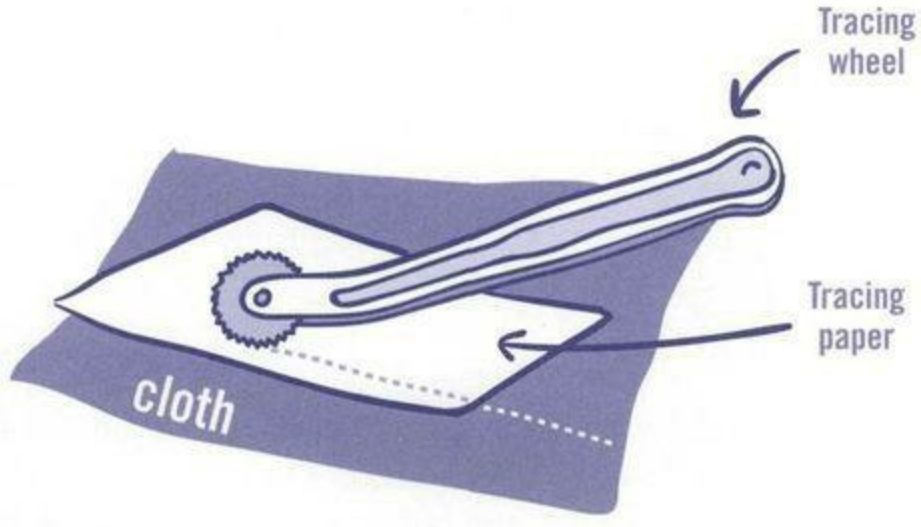


Clear ruler, 18 inches by 2 inches. A see-through ruler makes it easy to lay a pattern out correctly and to make corrections while fitting.

Tape measure. This is always a good tool to have. You'll use it to measure your body, the width of your fabric, the length of your cut …you get the idea. It will also help even your hems. Make sure you buy a good-quality one that will not stretch and has measurements clearly marked on both sides, starting at opposite ends. It could have centimeters if you go shopping in Europe.



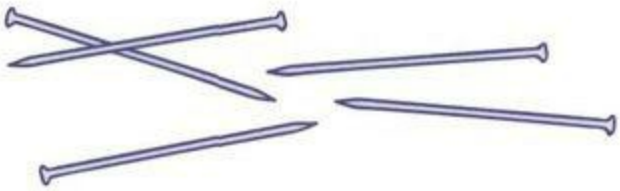
Tailor's chalk, dry kind. Tailor's chalk comes in many forms. You want the dry powdery kind; the marks from the greasy type cannot be removed from the fabric.



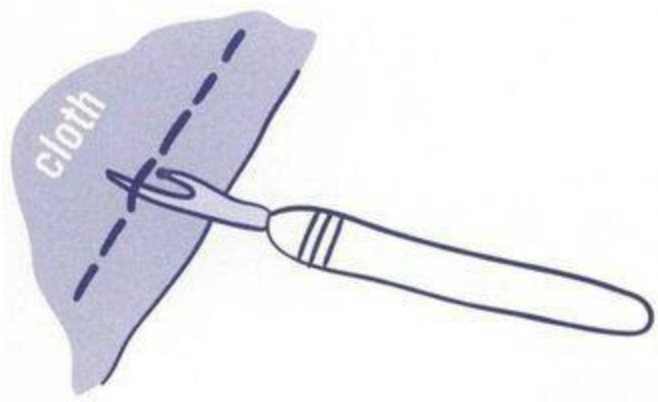
Dressmaker's tracing wheel. Used with dressmaker's tracing paper, it transfers markings from the pattern to your fabric.

Dressmaker's tracing paper. Used with the wheel to transfer markings from the pattern or to draw new lines for alterations.

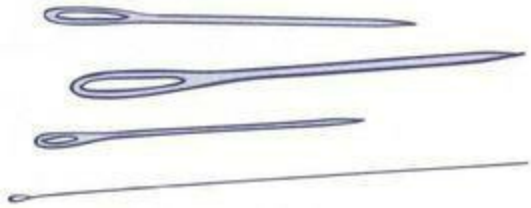
Magnetic seam guide. So simple, you'll wonder why you didn't invent it. Place this nonslip power-grip magnet on your sewing machine to sew even seams. Definitely a garment industry secret!



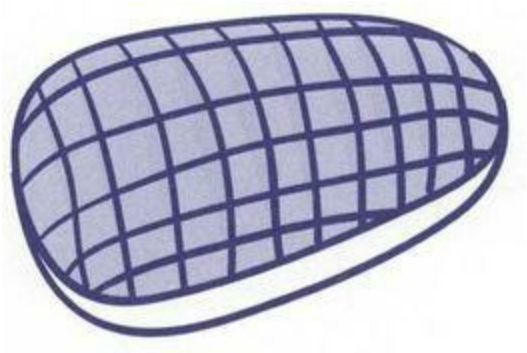
Dressmaker's pins (size 17). Pins come in all sizes and many varieties. Size 17 will go through most fabrics without leaving large holes.
It is best to get the nickel-plated stainless kind, so they can be picked up by a magnet.



Seam ripper. Even a good sewer can make a mistake. A seam ripper can be used in two ways: to remove a few stitches or seams, use the point to lift the loops of each stitch and pull out the thread end; to remove larger areas, cut the thread every few stitches (i.e., five), then on the back of the fabric pull the bobbin thread on that side. It should be easy to pull away. If not, cut more threads on the first side.



Hand sewing needles. Great for hand-sewn hems and small repairs. One package of "household assortment" multisized needles can take care of all your hand repairs.

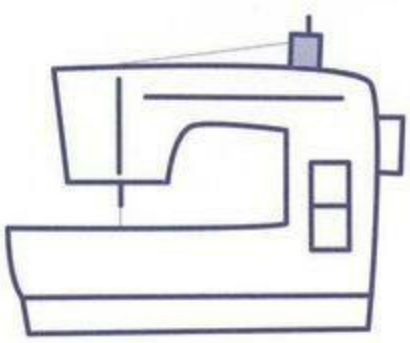


Tailor's ham or dressmaker's ham. It really does looks like a ham. A hard pillow, the tailor's ham is an ironing tool, which will help you iron any curved surface, such as darts.

Fuse tape. Sold under such brand names as Stitch Witchery® and Jiffy Fuse®, this is a form of glue. You will use it to finish the envelope edges of the pillow and for the slit of the skirt. It's also useful for quick hem repairs. You iron it on. It is washable and dry cleanable.

Thread to match your fabric. When selecting thread for garments and crafts, always choose all-

purpose thread. There are many different types of threads meant for different purposes. Button and carpet thread is for sewing on buttons or repairing carpets; rayon thread is used for decorative machine stitching, **topstitching,** monogramming, and embroidery. Always be sure to pick a color slightly darker than the predominant color of your garment.



A good sewing machine. There is nothing more frustrating than a sewing machine that does not work well. Clean your sewing machine with small brushes, cotton swabs, or a can of compressed air. Also, you can call your local sewing machine dealer to schedule a tune-up.

Patterns

Once you have all of your basic supplies, you're ready to deal with patterns. There's no need to buy patterns to make the three projects detailed in this book—they're conveniently glued to the back cover. But when you're ready to try something new, keep these things in mind:

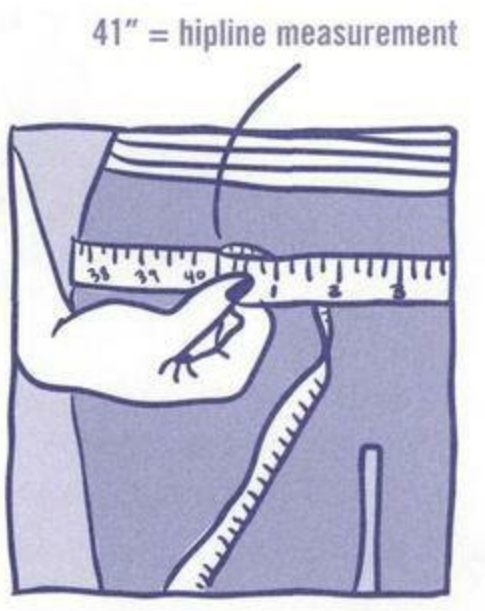
1. In order to purchase the correct pattern (and make clothes that actually fit!), you must know how to correctly take your body measurements. To make skirts and pants, you'll need waist and hip sizes; for shirts and dresses, don't forget your bust.

Here's how to take your measurements:

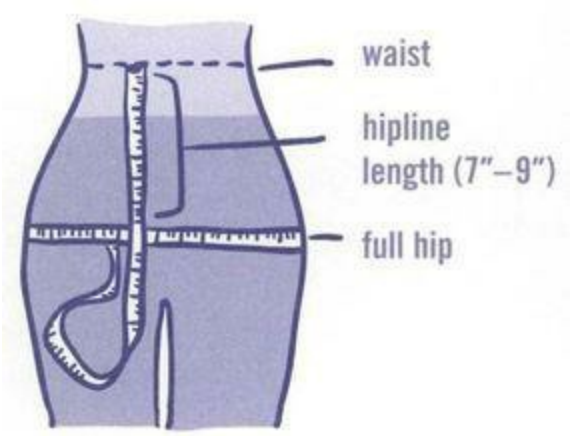
HOW TO FIND YOUR ACTUAL WAISTLINE

Waist: Find your waist by tilting your body to the side as if you were exercising. Put your right hand on your hip and your left hand up over your shoulder, creating an arc. Start bending toward the right. You will feel your body form a crease on the right-hand side. Repeat on your left side. The creases are your waistline. Wrap the tape measure around yourself comfortably and take the measurement.

HOW TO MEASURE YOUR HIP



Hip: Finding your hips is much easier once you've found your waist. Take your tape measure and hold it at your waist, letting it drop to the floor. Your hip is usually about 7 to 9 inches down from your true waistline. Your hips are the fullest part between your waist and thigh. (You can find it when you look for where last night's cheesecake, pizza, or chocolate brownies landed.) Once you've found your hips, wrap the tape measure around them comfortably. Now read your hip measurement



HOW TO MEASURE
YOUR BUSTLINE

Bust: Wrap the tape measure around your shoulder blades and across the highest point of your bust. Be especially careful to keep the tape at an even height. Don't let it slide down your back. Use a mirror to check that it's even.

2. Use the chart on the back of the pattern envelope to determine which size comes closest to your body measurements. Most patterns come with a range of sizes in the envelope. Make sure to buy a pattern that will be the same size or slightly bigger than your measurements. (Contrary to popular belief, patterns are not sized like clothes in the store. It will probably shock you to learn that in a sewing pattern your size will be at least two sizes bigger than your usual store-bought clothing size.)

3. Examine the pattern picture very carefully, especially the back views. You may think you have a skirt with an elastic waistband, but it may be another style.

4. Since you are a beginner, always start with a SIMPLE-TO-MAKE STYLE. Do not choose styles with collars, set-in sleeves, zippers, or close-to-the-body fit if you have never sewn before. To start, use the skirt pattern in this book.

5. Your fabric choice will be 75 percent of your sewing success. If you buy a commercial pattern, on the back of the envelope will be a list of the best fabrics for the style. There will also be a list of all the sewing **notions** you will need to make the garment.

6. Check to make sure that you are buying the amount of fabric needed for your project. The back of the pattern envelope has a yardage chart for each style. Note that fabric is measured in **yards,** not feet or meters.

7. All major American pattern companies include % of an inch **seam allowance** in their patterns. The skirt pattern in this book does too. Seam allowance is the distance between the edge of the fabric and the sewing line. European patterns sometimes do not have seam allowances, so you must add them or your garment will be smaller and may not fit properly.

8. Pull the instruction sheet out of the envelope. Look at the style you have chosen to sew and cut out only those pattern pieces.

Chapter 2

Fabric Has Personality:

BUYING THE RIGHT FABRIC FOR YOUR PROJECT

Choosing **fabric** can be one of the most exciting aspects of your sewing project. You will fall in love with so many different kinds that you won't be able to buy just one. As you shop, the most important thing is to keep in mind the type of project you're making. Consider the **drape,** touch, and feel of the fabric. Don't be afraid to handle and play with fabric. It's the only way you will gain more experience about how it drapes. Try draping fabric on your waist or leg to get an idea of what it would look like if you were wearing it. Boutiques or the designer department of any major store is the best resource for learning about clothes. Use a store like a museum or a research library. Look at clothing and examine how it is made and how it drapes. Also read the care label inside to see what the fabric content is. I always say "There's No Fashion Police" to stop you from looking or even trying a garment on in the dressing room and taking notes. Some of the top designers in the fashion business admit to doing this themselves.

First of All, What Is Fabric?

Fabric is a covering that is either **woven, knit,** nonwoven, or skin (that is, leather or fur). Wovens, knits, and nonwovens are formed with **yarns** and **fibers.** Yarns are what most fabrics consist of. These yarns are put together either by the interlacing method of **weaving** or by the interlooping method of **knitting.**
Fabric can also be made through nonwoven or nonknitted processes—for example, by braiding, felting, bonding, laminating, and "tanning" of skins from animals or reptiles for leather and fur. Remember when you studied about cavemen? They used skins to cover their bodies and keep themselves warm. Just think, we are still using skins today! But technology has so advanced that now we mass-produce fabrics that not only cover us but are specifically designed to hold in our body heat and form a skintight covering when we dance, ski, or work out.

Fabrics are mass-produced in big mills and made on either huge knitting machines or looms. Most fabrics are woven or knitted to widths of 45 or 60 inches (keep in mind that handmade fabrics, such as Guatemalan cotton or Chinese **tapestry** patterns, can be much narrower: 17 to 36 inches). You measure the length by increments of yards.

Fabric can be broken into different categories. These categories will help you get to know "fabric personality." To weave or knit fabric, fibers are "spun" together with yarns. Yarn fibers are either natural, such as wool, silk, cotton, and linen, or **man-made,** such as micro fibers, **polyester, Lycra,** and nylon. Synthetics include Ultrasuede, vinyls such as plastic-coated fabrics, and rubberized fabrics such as neoprene for special-purpose clothing (gloves and wet suits).

Here are some fabric categories that will help you choose the right fabric for your project.

Sportswear Fabrics for Casual Wear

This is the biggest category of fabric since it includes knits and wovens or stretch wovens.

Cottons. Fabrics woven in cotton fiber are great for just about anything—skirts, pillows, you name it. Plus, it's sold in many different prints, from solids in every color of the rainbow to plaids and quirky designs.

Knits. All types of polyester knits look great for elastic-waist skirts. Wool double knits are especially easy to sew and make beautiful elastic-waist skirts. (I had one student who made her whole winter wardrobe out of double knit elastic-waist skirts. Did she look chic! And her sewing skills improved so much by practicing the same style over and over again.)

Stretch wovens. These are especially "in" right now. Some might be labeled Lycra.

Fabrics woven in linen. A great summer fabric, but it wrinkles easily.

Denim. Easy and wonderful to sew; nothing looks bad in cotton denim or stretch cotton denim.

Fake leathers such as Ultrasuede. These are very sporty looking and not too difficult to sew. They are a good choice for tote bags.

Fabrics woven in wool flannels, tweeds, and twills. These make beautiful elastic-waist skirts and tote bags, and even a fun pillow.

Corduroy. It is sporty but it will look very bulky as an elastic-waist skirt. It will make a real cute tote bag. Also keep in mind that corduroy has a nap, which will be important to note at the cutting phase.

Glamorous Fabrics

Drapey and elegant. Try satin charmeuse, silks, sheer georgettes, chiffons, and rayons for a touch of glamour. Rayons (chemically engineered from wood pulp) are an especially good choice and are always drapey and soft. These fabrics look so slinky in an elastic-waist skirt. Accent it with some beaded or sequin trim.

Glitzy. Good choices are silks, bridal satins, taffetas, velvets, and lace. Knits that shine or have trims on them can look glamorous too. Fabrics trimmed with metallic threads, sequins, or rhinestones naturally look glitzy. But don't feel that the fashion police are at your door; you can also wear these

glamorous fabrics as day wear. You be your own designer. A glitzy skirt is always flattering. These fabrics make wonderful bags and pillows, too.

Warm and fuzzy. Fake furs come in leopard, pony skin, zebra, and many other patterns. There are even furs that look like ostrich feathers. Then there is that wonderful stuff called polar fleece (a knit). There are so many varieties of fleece—some are brushed on both sides and some just have one side brushed up. Also consider brushed wools, such as mohair.

High-tech, high-performance. When you think of performance fabrics, you probably think of the words acrylic, spandex, and cool max. These are the fibers that are woven into performance fabrics so they stretch, keep out cold, and absorb perspiration, making them perfect for athletic clothes. But a cotton and Lycra stretch knit would make a great slinky, sexy elastic-waist skirt. Some rainwear fabrics also look great as tote bags.

Home decoration fabrics. Woven tapestries make gorgeous pillows and come in lush big prints. If you purchase a home decoration fabric in a print, check to see if the print is "one directional"—after all, you don't want upside-down roses on your skirt. These fabrics look great as tote bags too.

Getting to Know Your Grains

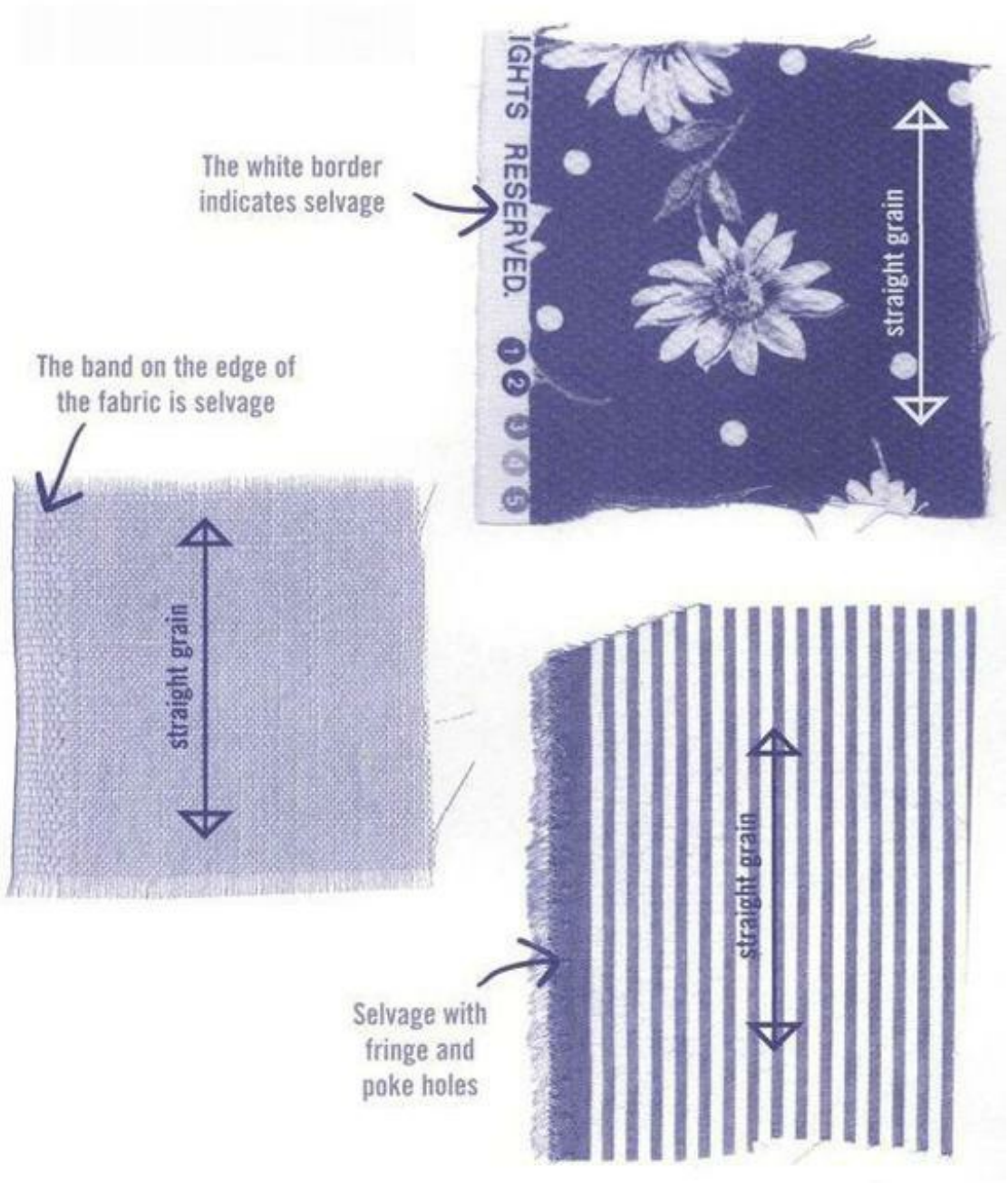
STRAIGHT GRAIN

Many sewers are unaware of the importance of finding their fabric's **straight grain** before cutting out their pattern. But this step is crucial for making any garment that hangs properly when worn. Here's how to find the straight grain of your woven fabric.

When fabrics are woven each side of the fabric is finished without a frayed edge. This edge is called a **selvage.** The selvage runs along the length of the fabric of both sides.

Looking carefully at the fabric you bought, you will be able to identify the selvage by asking yourself these questions: Does it have little holes poked into it? Does it have a little fringe running along either side? Or does it have a woven or printed band running along either side?

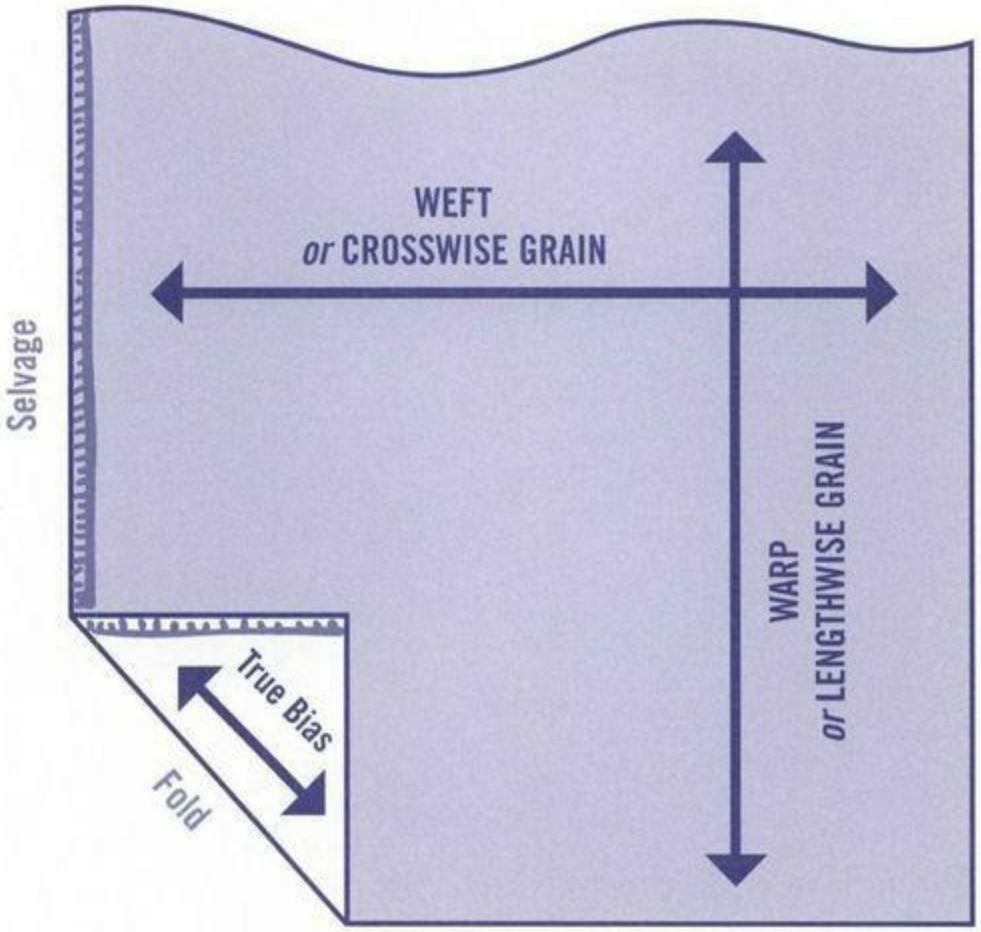
DIFFERENT KINDS OF SELVAGE


The white border indicates selvage
IGHTS RESERVED.
straight grain
The band on the edge of the fabric is selvage
straight grain
straight grain
Selvage with fringe and poke holes

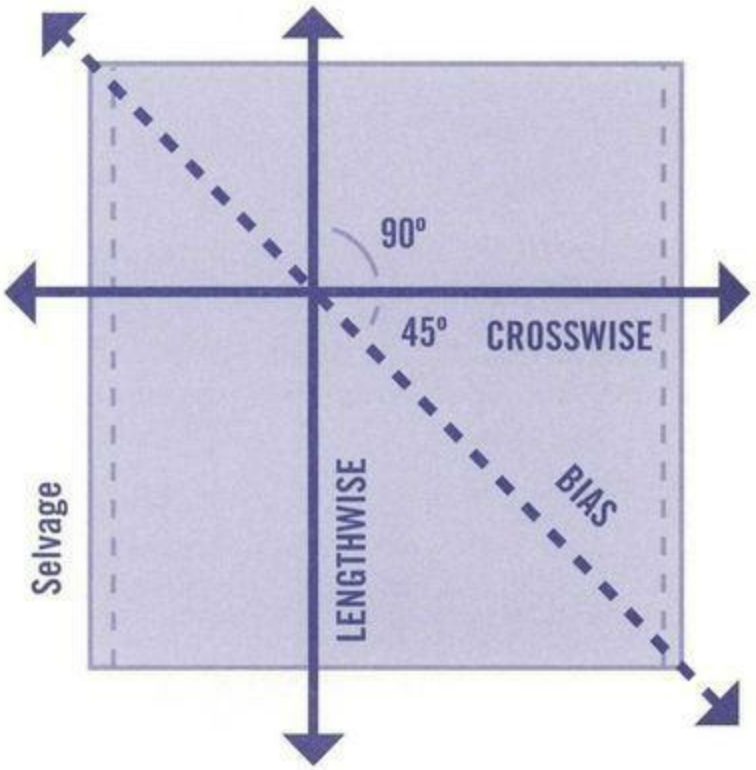
Now you know you have found the **lengthwise straight grain** of your fabric by locating the selvages. The lengthwise grain in textile terms is called the **warp.** The warp threads in a woven fabric are the strongest part of the fabric because they are pulled tightly during the weaving process.

The **weft** is the **cross grain** of the fabric. The weft threads run back and forth from selvage to selvage of the fabric. The weft has a little give and is softer than the warp.

FABRIC GRAIN IN WOVENS



BIAS IN WOVENS



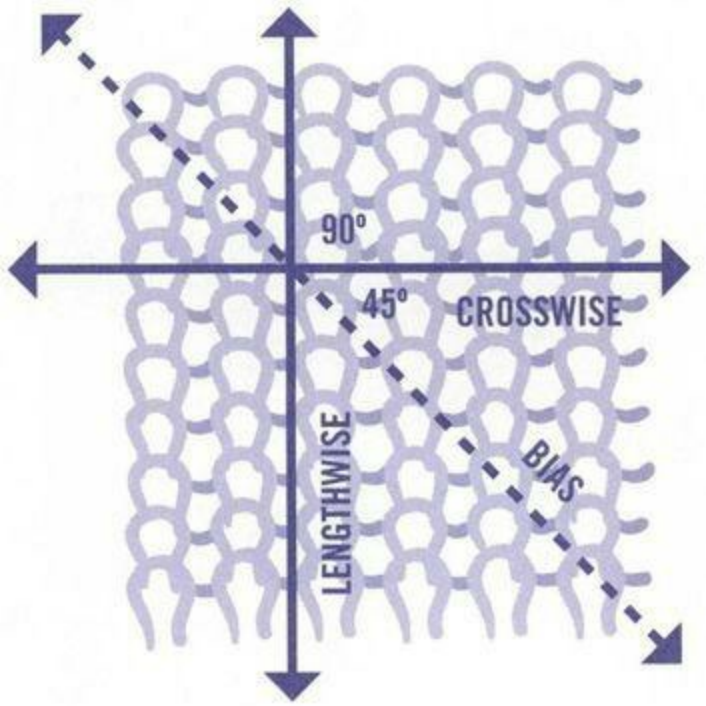
Bias is a term used to describe any diagonal across the fabric. The bias makes the fabric hang soft and drapey. But the true bias is created only by a 45-degree angle from the fabric's straight grain. The bias hugs the body and takes the shape of the body's contours. It has the greatest stretch and will

drape beautifully. You will often see designers create sexy evening dresses by cutting them on the true bias. You can use a bias cut to make bias strips for a neckline, armhole finish, soft bows, and cording as well as other uses. Generally, bias-cut garments use more yardage and therefore are more expensive.

Most garments are cut on the straight grain (with the lengthwise threads hanging down on your body) because it is the lengthwise threads that hold the garment in its shape. The cross grain threads fit softer around the body.

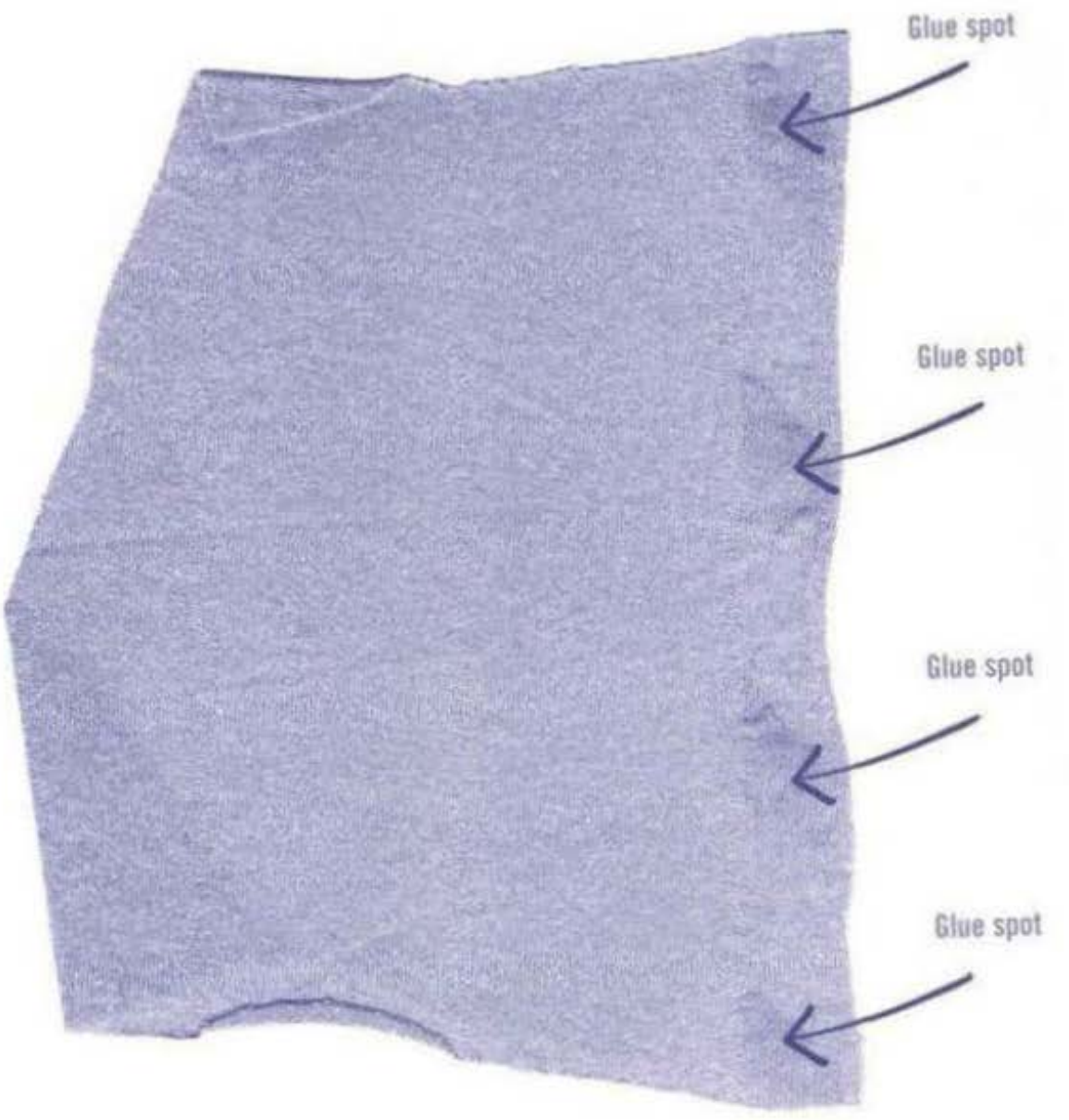
Keep these properties of fabric in mind as you begin to lay out your fabric. If you just cut out your fabric in any old direction, you will get a skirt that won't hang properly.

CLOSE-UP OF A KNIT FABRIC SHOWING BOTH GRAIN AND BIAS



For knits you can identify the running length by finding the approximately one-inch band of glue blotches or fine poke holes along both cut edges of the fabric. (Knits do not have a straight grain since they are not interwoven.)

FINDING SELVAGE ON A KNIT FABRIC


Glue spot
Glue spot
Glue spot
Glue spot

Chapter 3

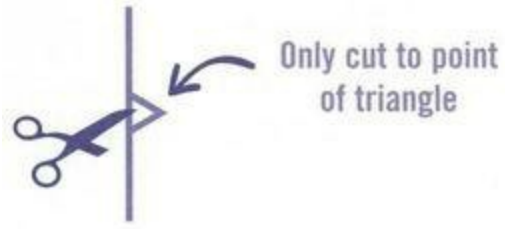
Before You Start Cutting:

PATTERN AND SEWING TERMS YOU SHOULD KNOW

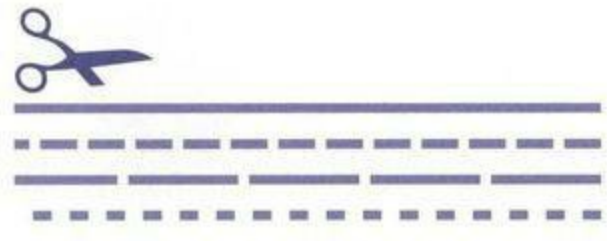
Before you start cutting out your fabric, familiarize yourself with the following terms and symbols. They will help you in laying out your patterns properly.

Straight grain. This symbol means that it should be placed parallel to the selvage (or fold) of the fabric. Always use a ruler to make sure that you are equidistant from the selvage of the fabric to each end of the straight grain line.

Place on fold of fabric. This symbol means the pattern should be pinned to the **fold line** of the fabric.



Notches. These symbols are very important since they are matching points to other pattern pieces or markings. After you've cut your pattern out, but before you *un*pin it, check to see that you've notched your fabric. Using the tips of your scissors, just **clip** into the center of the notch. DO NOT cut out the triangle; it's time-consuming and unnecessary.

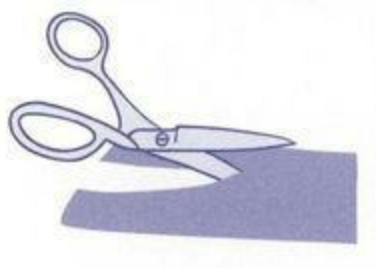


Cutting lines. Patterns have different cutting lines for different sizes. Sometimes they are solid lines; sometimes they are broken lines.

Seam allowance. This is the distance between the cutting line and the sewing line of a pattern. All American commercial patterns include a 5/8-inch seam allowance in their patterns unless otherwise noted. The skirt pattern in this book has 5/8-inch seam allowance.

Chapter 4

The Cutting Rules



Naturally you want your sewing project to come out looking great. If you follow these rules, you will have sewing success on any project you plan to make.

Rule 1 .

Cut on the line of your pattern, which is the correct size according to your measurements. Not all projects have multiple sizes, though. For example, the pillow and the tote projects in this book only use one size.

Rule 2 .

Press out your fabric if it is very wrinkled. Press out your pattern if it is very creased. Since your pattern is made of paper or tissue, use a dry iron (no steam).

Rule 3 .

The right side of the fabric is called the face. Always fold the face side of the fabric inward so that it is on the inside of the folded fabric. The exception to this rule is velvet; when folding velvet, have the face on the outside.

Rule 4.

If folding the fabric, make sure the edges are placed evenly, selvage on top of selvage. Take time to smooth out your fabric so there are no ripples, and it is lying flat on the table.

Rule 5 .

Pin down all your pieces properly. The pattern piece that is marked **center front** fold should be pinned to the fold of the fabric. Note: This rule does not apply to the pillow or tote projects

Rule 6.*

Make sure the arrow on the pattern piece marked STRAIGHT GRAIN LINE is measured so that it is absolutely **parallel** to the selvage of the fabric or fold line. To check if your selvage is parallel to the straight grain line, use a ruler to measure from the straight grain line on the pattern to the selvage or fold of the fabric. The measurement should be the same at each end of the straight grain line. Pin the grain line down before pinning the rest of the pattern piece. Only use as many pins as you need. Softer, more slippery fabrics require more pins.

Rule 7 .

When cutting out your pattern pieces, make sure to cut your pieces as evenly as possible. If you cut evenly, you will be able to sew your project together much more easily. Take small snips, using the tips of the scissors. Keep your eye on the pattern line.

Rule 8.

When you are cutting, never move the pattern pieces that are pinned to the fabric and never slide your hand under the pattern pieces.

Rule 9.

Clip the “notches” on your pattern pieces using only the tips of your scissors.

Rule 10.

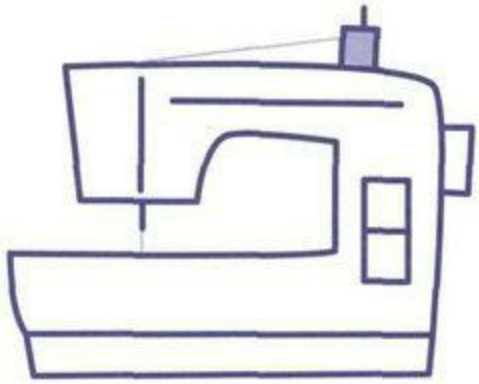
Mark an “X” with tailor’s chalk at the bottom of your project to indicate the wrong side of your fabric. This will save you time figuring the pieces out.

*Note on slippery fabrics: If you have slippery fabric, make sure to run the selvage of the fabric along a table that has a straight edge. This will help to keep the fabric lying on perfect grain. In addition you tear the fabric at the very top to find the even (weft) cross grain. Then when you lay it on a table and run the length of the fabric along the length of the table, the top of the fabric (where you tore it) should be even too. The fabric will be on perfect straight grain if it is forming a right angle.

Chapter 5

Sewing Machine Fear:

HOW TO GET OVER IT FOR GOOD



When you look at this simple machine, does it frighten you? That is only because you are unfamiliar with it. Relax. When you get a handle on how easy it is to use, and then "bond" with your machine, it will give you back so much pleasure. And it will save you money, too.

All sewing machines are actually very much alike in how they thread and how they operate. Once you have learned how to use a basic sewing machine with a little help from the manual, you can adapt yourself to any model.

All sewing machines sew a stitch formation known as a **"lockstitch."** This stitch is formed by the machine with a top thread and a **bobbin** thread, which comes from the bottom of the machine. Each time the needle penetrates the fabric, the machine creates a knot, or the "lock" of the lockstitch. Those are the little stitches you see on the collars of some of your shirts, pockets, and the orange stitches on your jeans.

An Industrial Versus a Home Sewing Machine

An industrial machine is designed to sew one type of stitch for repetitious factory use. For example, some industrial machines only sew a lockstitch or only sew an overlock stitch. They are made for turning out hundreds of garments daily. A good example of this can be seen when you look at your jeans. Jeans are made on at least two different types of industrial machines because several kinds of stitches are needed to assemble them.

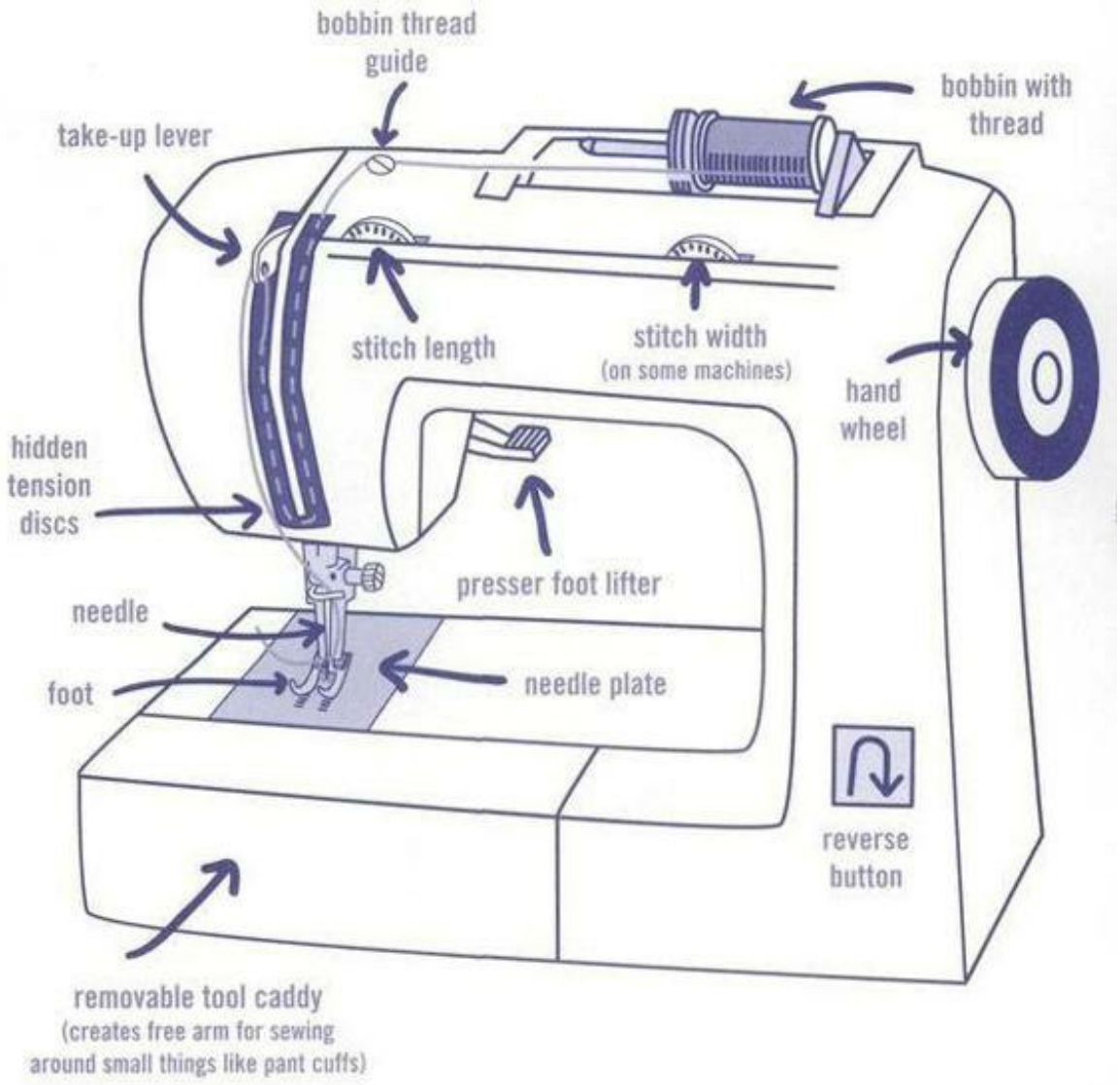
The home sewing machine is much more versatile than an industrial one.
It has many stitches that imitate those of industrial machines but it also does embroidery and knit

stitches. All you have to do is turn the stitch pattern dial on your machine to change the stitch. With the variety of stitches you have available on your home sewing machine, you can make a very professional garment. The embroidery stitches can add some finishing touches that will make your garment look unique. You will also be able to sew many different kinds of fabric easily by using the proper **sewing foot,** needle, and **stitch length.** Refer to the instruction manual that comes with the machine, and experiment with your sewing on a scrap piece of fabric.

For sewing projects in this book, you will be using the **all-purpose foot,** which is always on your sewing machine. You will then be changing to a **zipper foot** to sew in the elastic waist or put decorative piping on your pillow.

The Parts of Your Sewing Machine

Here is a diagram of a typical sewing machine. Follow along and you will see how all sewing machines work in a similar way.



1. Thread the needle from front to back. (Some of the very old machines thread from left to right.)

2. Have a reverse button, and it is some times indicated with this symbol:

3. Have a bobbin winder. When it winds a bobbin, it will stop when it is full. Each model and brand varies slightly in how it threads and winds a bobbin. Check your owner's manual for your machine's specifics.

4. Have a **bobbin case.** Some machines have drop-in bobbins while other machines have a separate bobbin in a bobbin case to insert it into the machine. Use your sewing machine's user manual to locate the bobbin case.

5. Have a clutch. Some machines automatically disengage the bobbin winder. On other machines, you have to disengage the clutch by turning the stop-motion knob. This apparatus stops the sewing machine needle from moving up and down while winding a bobbin.

6. Have a dial for stitch length in order to make the stitch longer or shorter. Better models also have a dial for stitch width so that you can make the stitch wider or narrower. Think of stitch width as zigzag stitches spreading out or bunching tightly together.

7. Have a dial to click or turn to each stitch pattern.

8. Have **feed dogs.** They pull the fabric through the machine while it is sewing. You do not have to pull the fabric; the machine will do this for you.

9. Have a free arm. The machines that were made after the 1950s have an accessory tray that can be removed. When you remove it, it makes the machine a free arm. Its purpose is to allow you to sew small areas that are hard to get to, like cuffs on a shirt.

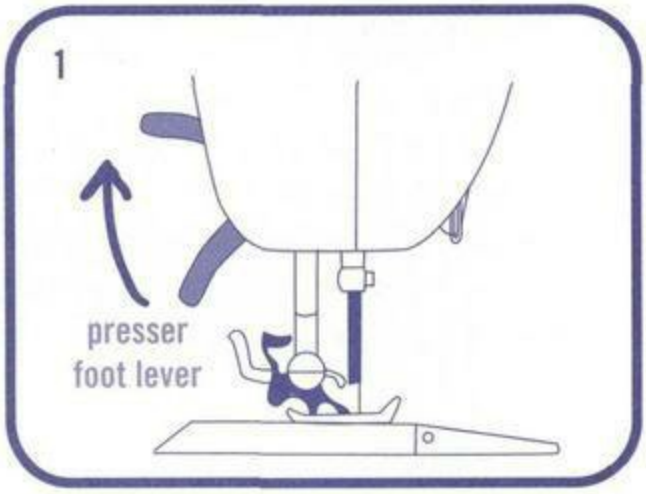
10. Have a shank bar. The shank bar is where the shank adapter screws on in order to attach sewing feet. Most machines made today are low shank. But older models can be high shank. It is important to know whether your machine is high or low shank so that you can always buy additional sewing feet that will fit your machine.

11. Have sewing feet. Most machines come with an all-purpose foot already on the shank bar; however, there are many feet that you can buy to help you to sew different finishes or use as sewing guides. For example, a Teflon foot will help you sew leather and plastic. Remember it's your hands and sewing feet that will help you to sew any project easier and better.

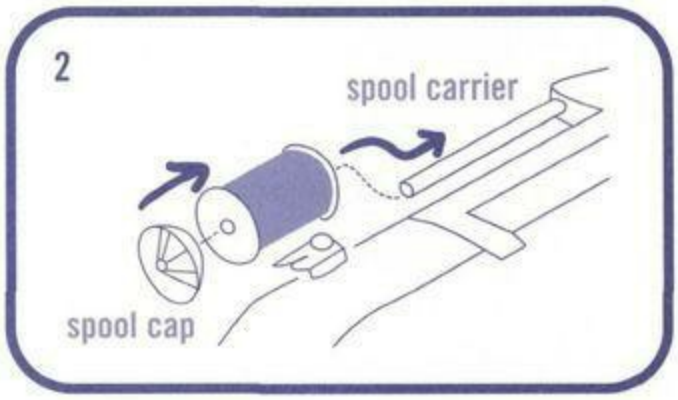
Threading Your Machine

Be extra careful to thread your machine properly. Otherwise, it will not sew.

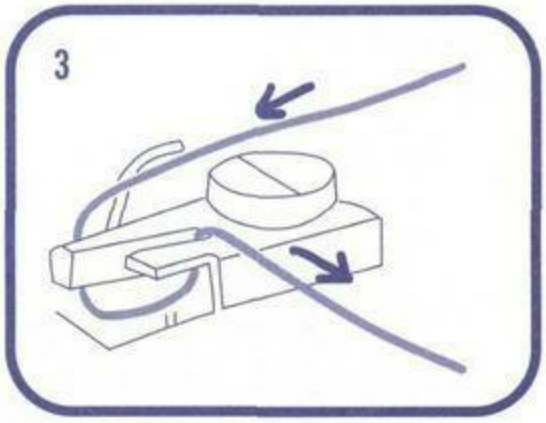
1. Raise foot with presser foot lever.



2. The spool carrier holds the thread for you. A spool cap keeps your thread from falling off. Place spool on the spool carrier and grab end of thread.



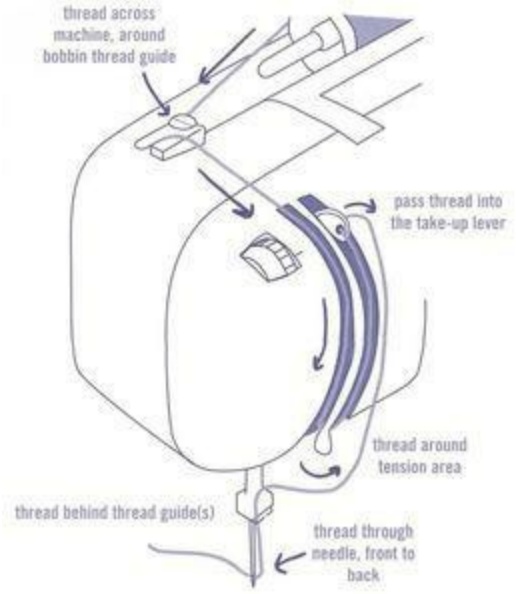
3. Pull your thread across the machine, around bobbin thread guide (may be different than the one pictured here), and continue to thread the machine. Follow the threading instructions.



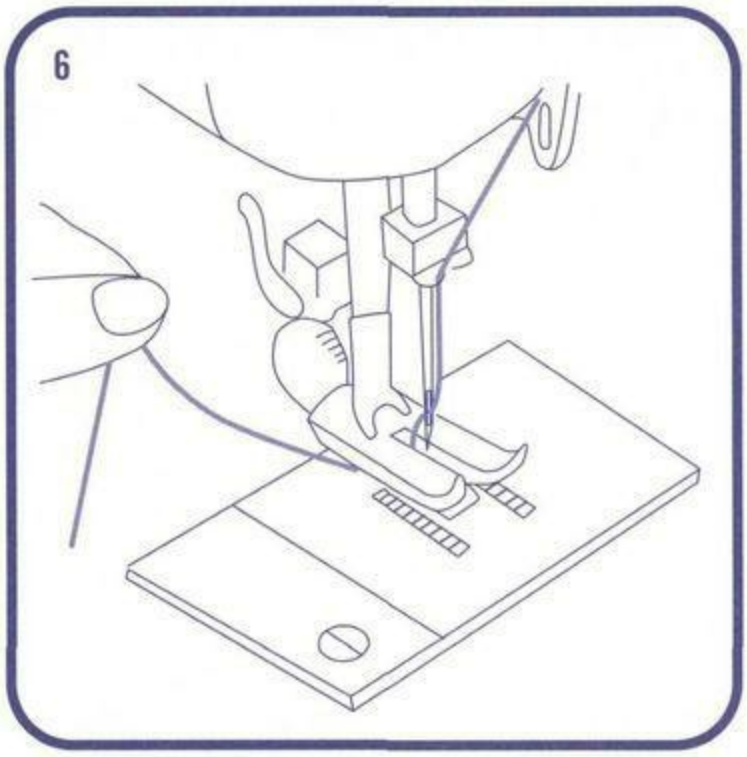
4. Make sure to pull the thread through the tension discs. (On older machines made in the 1950s you can actually see the tension discs, but on today's new models they are hidden within the machine.) The tension controls the flow of the thread through your machine. For example, if the tension is too loose or your thread isn't passing through the tension area, it will cause the sewn stitches on whatever you are making to be loose or even loopy. If the tension is too tight it will cause your sewn stitches to pucker.

5. You must make sure to pass the thread into the take-up lever and then down and around through the thread guides.

STEPS 3, 4, 5

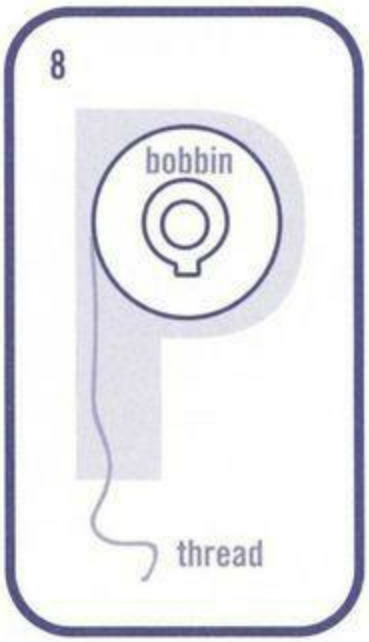

thread across machine, around bobbin thread guide
pass thread into the take-up lever
thread around tension area
thread behind thread guide(s)
thread through needle, front to back

6. Slide the thread through the thread guide and then thread into the needle eye. Pull your thread towards the back of the machine and make sure it is under the all-purpose foot.



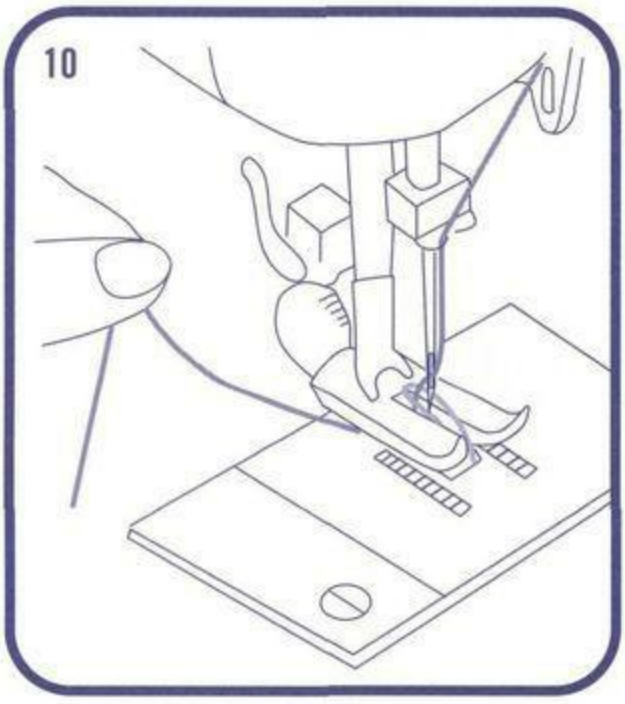
7. A bobbin is a second source of thread to create the lockstitch. It is necessary to take thread from your spool and wind it onto a bobbin. Machines generally have a one-step or two-step bobbin-winding mode located on the top or side of your machine. Check your sewing machine's manual for more information on how to wind your bobbin.

8. Now that you have wound your bobbin, it's time to insert your bobbin into its case. Most machines have bobbin cases that are either top-loading or side-loading. Follow your machine's instruction book. No matter what kind of machine you have, make sure you create a "P" shape with your bobbin thread and then drop it into the bobbin case.

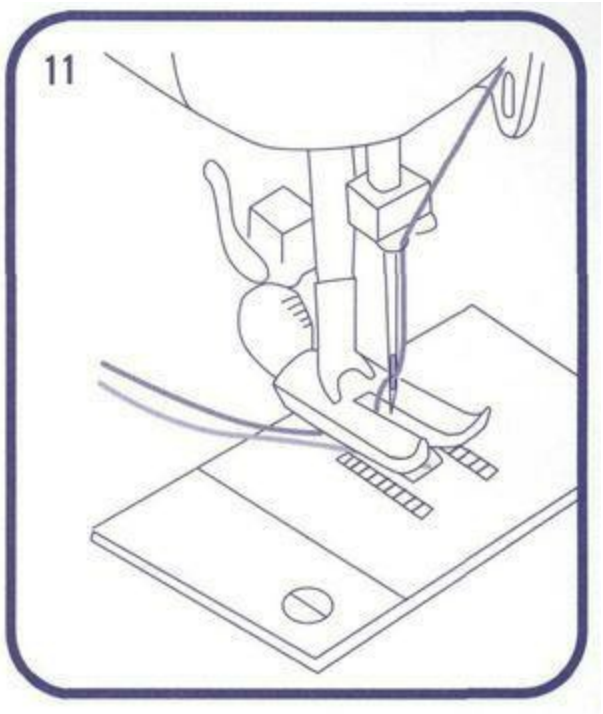


9. The most important thing to do now is bring the bobbin thread up so that it is coming out of the needle plate. Think of this as fly fishing. Use your left hand to hold the thread coming from the needle. With your right hand turn the handwheel towards you.

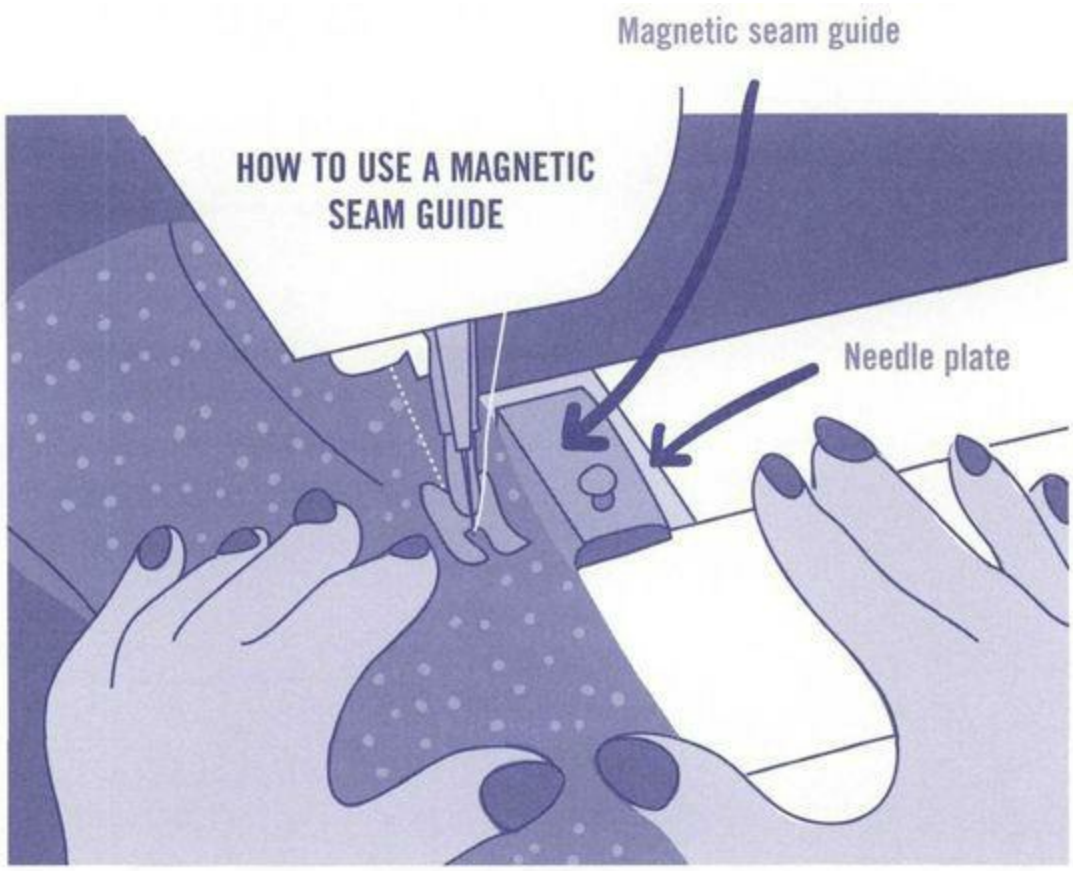
10. As you're doing that, keep gently tugging (as you would in fly fishing) the thread in your left hand until the bobbin thread has come up from under the needle plate in a loop shape. It will be looped around the top thread you're holding with your left hand.



11. Pull the thread you're holding up and out—when you pull up you should see the end of the bobbin thread come out. When you're ready to sew, pull both threads together and back behind and under the presser foot.



You are ready to start sewing. Practice on a scrap piece of fabric to test the machine to see if you have threaded it properly and to get a feel for sewing.



Using a Seam Guide

This is an additional tool placed or screwed on or near the needle plate of your sewing machine. It creates a "wall" against which the edges of the garment pieces can butt while being sewn. The guide will help you to sew perfectly straight, accurate seam lines. Even curves and jacket fronts are easier with a seam guide in position.

In addition, you will find that your sewing speed will improve with the use of a seam guide. You can train your eyes to look at the guide and not at the machine's needle. This encourages you to concentrate on the seam that is being stitched by your machine. A guide will save you lots of time. No need to trace sewing lines onto your fabric pattern pieces.

Here's how to use your seam guide.

Step 1 Place a clear ruler on the needle plate. Slide it underneath the presser foot and lower the needle until the tip is almost touching the ruler. Shift the ruler until the right edge is the same distance from the needle as the desired seam allowance of your pattern (usually 5/8 inch).

Step 2 Place the seam guide on the needle plate, butting the left edge against the ruler. Now remove the ruler.

Note: Some home sewing machines are sold with seam guide attachments. Yet there are manufacturers that do not recommend the use of a magnet on their computerized machines. Speak to your sewing machine dealer or call the manufacturer directly to find out if a magnet will damage your machine.

CUT OUT AND PASTE NEAR YOUR MACHINE

Final Checklist

Here is a list of items you should check each and every time you start to sew:

1. Are the threads from the sewing machine placed under the presser foot?
2. Is your fabric placed under the presser foot a little pact the needle of the machine?
3. Is your presser foot lever *DOWN?*
4. Now you can begin to sew. Make sure you lock the beginning and end of your seam by sewing three stitches forward, then three stitches in reverse. If you don't, your seam will come undone.

Chapter 6

Go to It: HOW TO MAKE AN ENVELOPE PILLOW COVER

A great accessory, the envelope pillow cover (so named because the back of the cover, where you will slip in your pillow, closes like an envelope) is a good first project.

In addition to the pattern in the back of the book and your survival kit basics, you will need:

- 1 yard fabric (45 to 60 inches wide) (refer to Chapter 2 for help in picking out the best fabric)
- 2 yards **piping** or fringe
- All-purpose thread to match
- 14-inch square pillow

Layout

Lay the fabric out with the face (right-side) up. Pin your front and back pattern pieces down to the fabric, making sure it's on straight grain.

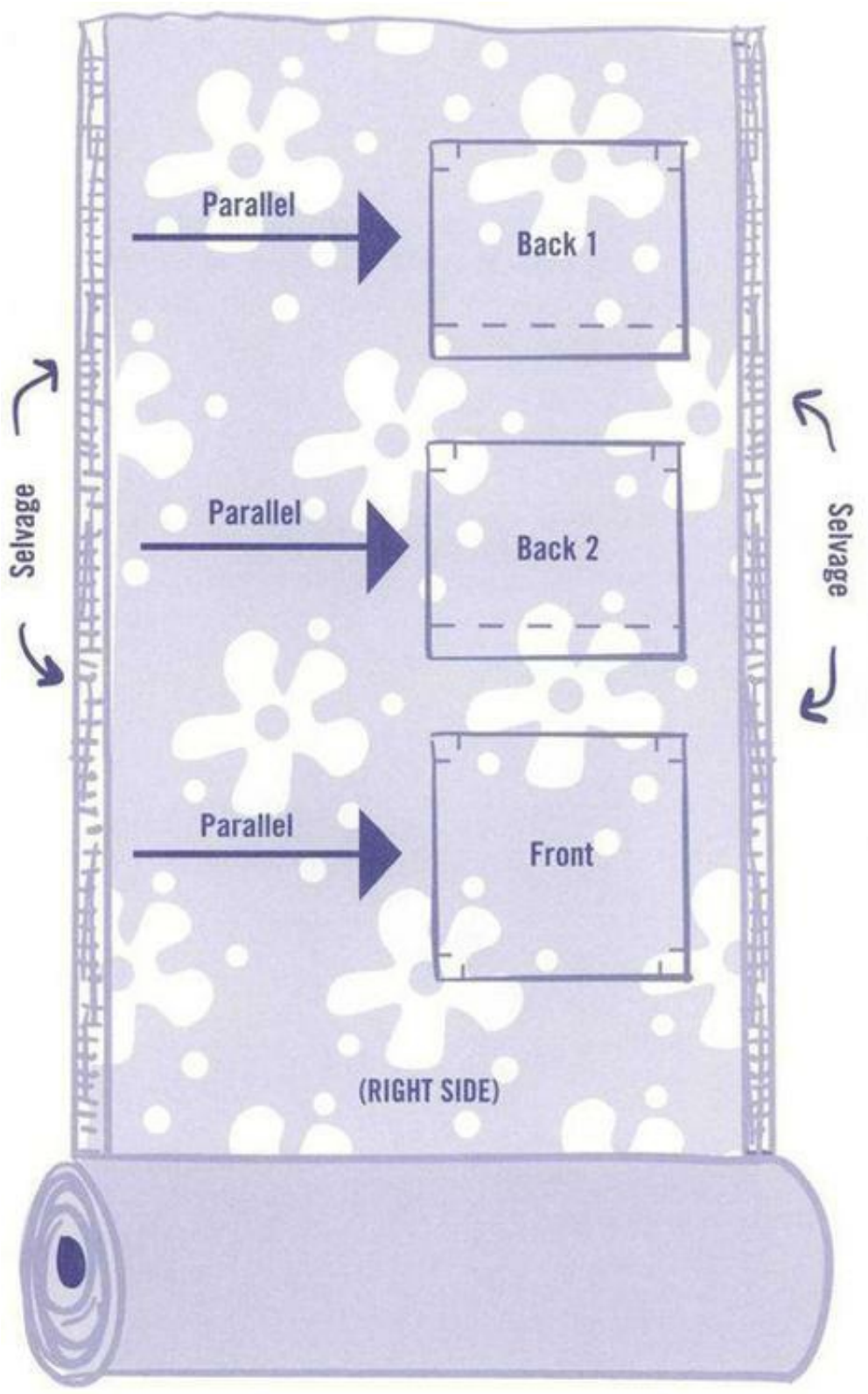
Now, cut out all three pattern pieces (refer to the the Cutting Rules in Chapter Four.

These are the notches to clip on your pillow pattern (Rule 9):

- Front at the upper-right-hand corner
- Front at the lower-right-hand corner
- Back 1 at the upper-left-hand corner
- Back 1 along the side seams
- Back 1 at the lower fold line
- Back 2 at the lower-left-hand corner
- Back 2 along the side seams

Back 2 at the upper fold line

Use this guide to help you understand the following pillow cover diagrams



Sewing Introductions

Step 1: Back Envelope Edges

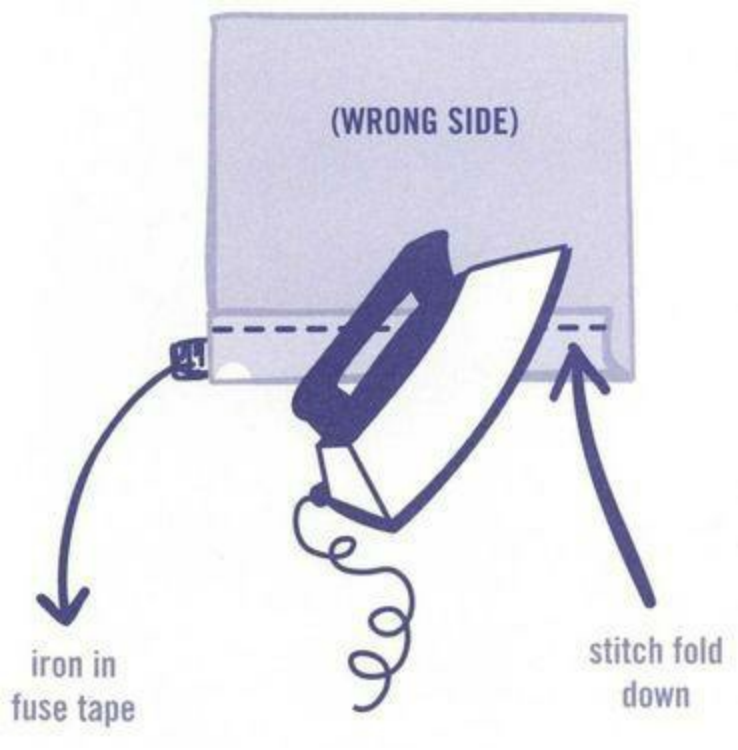
(To prevent burning, test a sample of the fuse tape on some fabric before ironing it into the pillow cover.) Unpin Back 1 paper pattern from fabric. To make the hem, at the bottom edge, fold the fabric

back 1½ inches at the notches. Press the hem to the wrong side of the fabric so that there is a crisp crease. Do the same for Back 2.

If you are using fuse tape or Stitch Witchery®, insert two strips of fuse tape side by side into the hem of pieces Back 1 and Back 2. Using an iron, press the fold back down. Depending on the fabric, it may fuse in as few as 15 seconds or in as many as 45.

If you decide to sew the envelope edges instead of using fuse tape, press back ¼ inch of the fabric at the raw edge of the fold back.

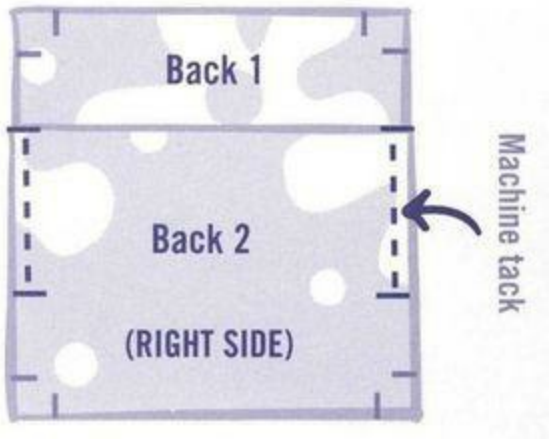
Stitch the fold down.



Step 2: Finishing the Back

Lay Back 2 faceup. Lay Back 1 on top of Back 2. Match the finished edge of Back 1 to the notch on the side of Back 2. (The finished edge of Back 2 will then match up with the notch in Back 1.) Pin the overlapped edges together. Machine-tack these two back pieces to form one piece the same size as the front pattern piece. Use ½-inch seam allowance.

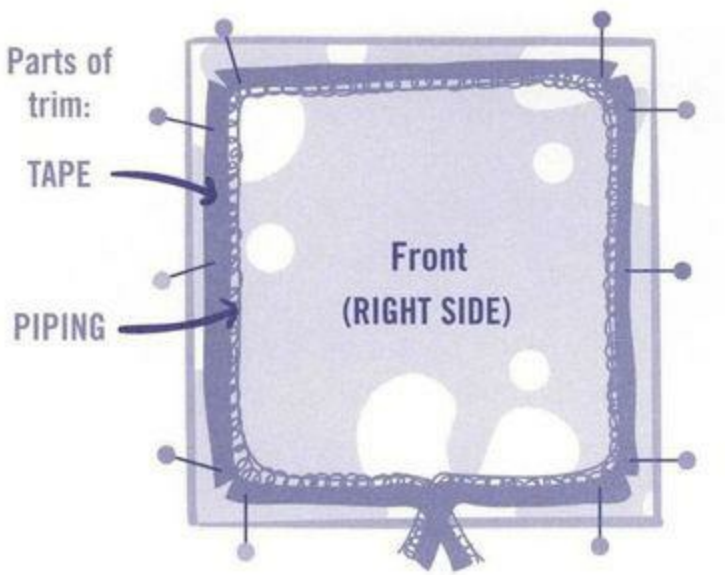
OVERLAP BACKS AND SEW THEM TOGETHER AT THE SIDE SEAMS



Step 3: Pinning the Piping

Lay the front piece (right side of fabric up) on the table. Start laying the piping out at the bottom edge of the pillow. Leave a 3-inch tail at the beginning. You can trim it down after you have sewn the piping on to the pillow. Lay the piping down so that the flat edge is closer to the raw edge of the fabric and the piping is facing the interior of the pillow. Using a ruler, measure the seam allowance (5/8 inch), and make sure the piping bumps up against it. Pin the piping tape to the right side of the fabric. Work your way around the edges of the pillow. At the corners, clip notches into the tape of piping so that it lays flat and curves slightly around the corners of fabric so they cross each other. Note that the corners will be rounded. Once you have reached the bottom again, overlap the piping edges.

PIN CORDING AND TRIM ON THE FACE OF THE PILLOW

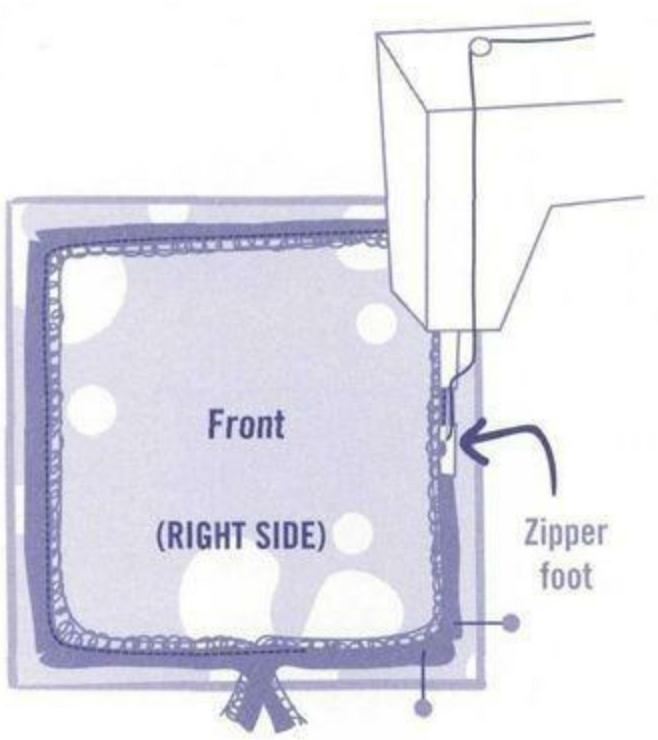


Step 4: Sewing the Piping

Now you are ready to sew the piping. Change the all-purpose presser to a zipper foot. Make sure to

adjust the zipper foot (or the needle, depending on your machine) so that the needle sits to the left of the foot. This position will allow you to stitch as close as possible to the piping without sewing on top of it. Sew the piping around the edge of the pillow cover.

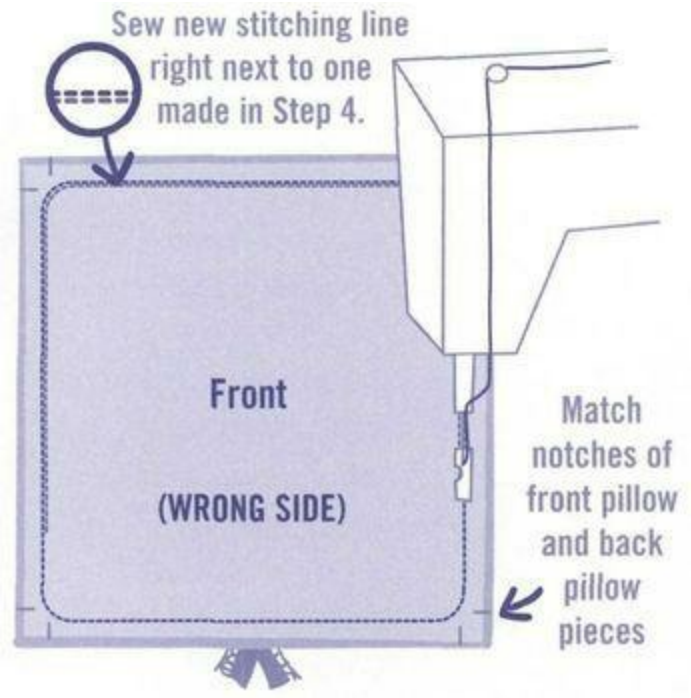
USING A ZIPPER FOOT TO SEW THE PIPING



Step 5: Sewing Front to Back

Lay the completed back piece faceup on the table. Lay the completed front piece facedown on top of the back. Match the notches in the corners. Pin the edge together. Using the zipper foot, sew around the edge of the pillowcase. Use the previous stitching line (for the piping) as your guide. If you stitch on the inside of that line, there is less of a chance for the piping tape to show.

SEW THE FRONT OF THE PILLOW COVER TO THE BACK, WRONG SIDES OUT


Sew new stitching line right next to one made in Step 4.
Front
(WRONG SIDE)
Match notches of front pillow and back pillow pieces

Step 6: Finishing

Using the tips of your scissors, clip the seam allowance at the corners. Turn the pillowcase right-side out. Press flat. Insert **pillow form**. You are done!

CLIP AND TRIM THE CORNERS OF YOUR PILLOW COVER SEAM ALLOWANCE

FINISHED PILLOW
Front
FINISHED PILLOW
Back

Chapter 7

Go to It: HOW TO MAKE A TOTE BAG

In addition to the pattern in the back of the book and your survival kit basics, you will need:

- 1 yard fabric, 45 to 60 inches wide (see Chapter 2 for ideas)
- 1 yard lining (or contrasting fabric) 45 to 60 inches wide
- 1 yard **fusible** weft (36 to 60 inches wide)
- 1 yard **needlepunch** (36 to 60 inches wide)
- All-purpose thread to match
- 1 yard seam binding

A Note About Fusible Weft and Needlepunch: Weft is a heavyweight fusible interfacing, which is used to stiffen the body of the tote bag. Needlepunch is a nonwoven fabric with a spongy texture, which adds body to the tote bag. These materials will help the bag stand on its own. Use one, both, or neither.

Layout

Lay out the fabric right-side up. Lay the tote pattern on the fabric. Make certain that the straight grain line is parallel to the selvage. Pin the pattern to the fabric. Pin the pocket and the strap, making certain the straight grain is parallel to selvage. Cut one bag, two pockets, and two straps. (Remember the Cutting Rules) Clip the notches (see below) using the tips of your scissors.

Use this guide to help you understand the following tote diagrams

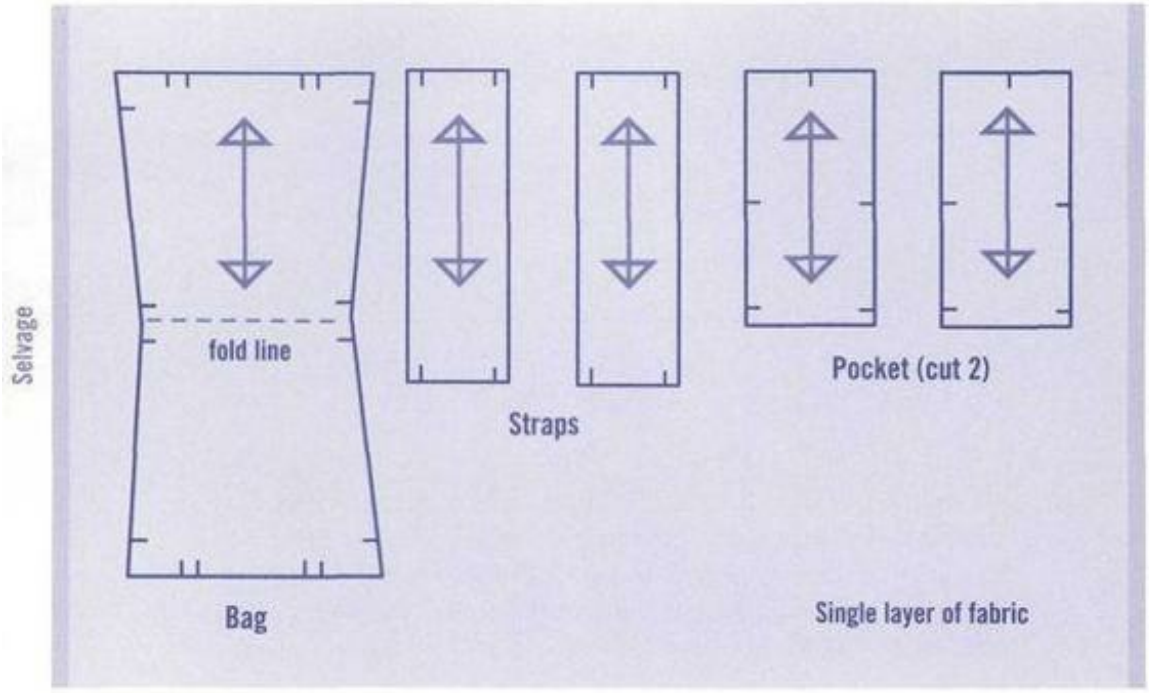
= FACE OR RIGHT SIDE OF FABRIC

= WRONG SIDE OF FABRIC

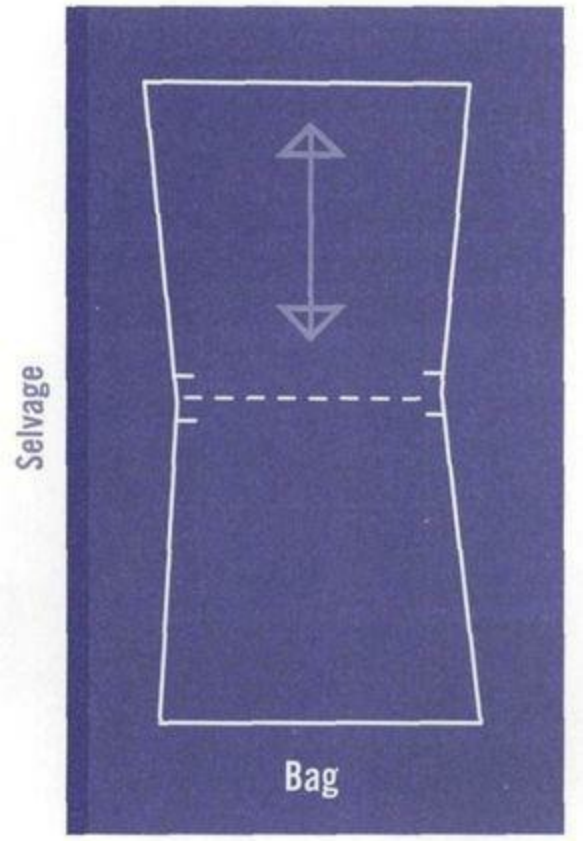
= LINING

= FUSIBLE OR NEEDLEPUNCH

TOTE BAG LAYOUT



LINING

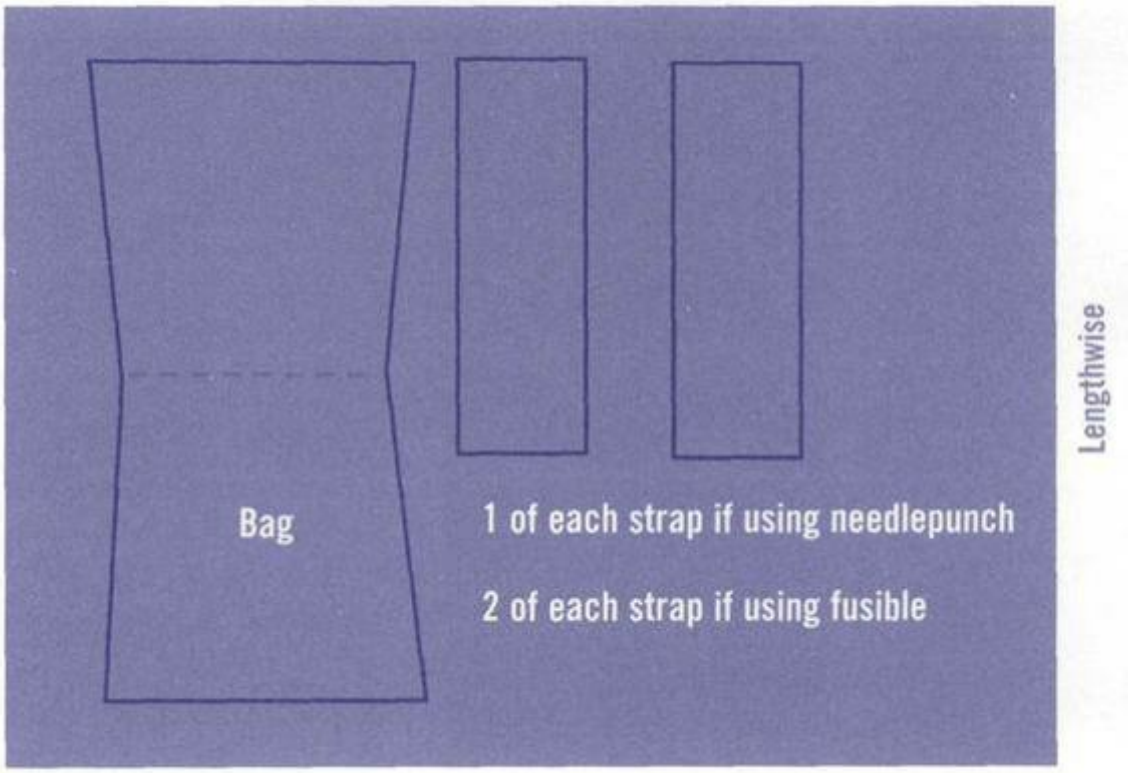


Lay out the lining fabric faceup. Lay the lining pattern on the fabric. Make certain the straight grain is parallel to the selvage. Pin. Cut. Clip notches (see below).

If you are using weft, cut out the tote bag pattern and straps. Clip notches.

If you are using needlepunch, cut out the tote bag pattern and one strap. Fold the strap in half lengthwise; cut along the fold. Otherwise, the thickness will make turning the strap difficult.

FUSIBLE OR NEEDLEPUNCH



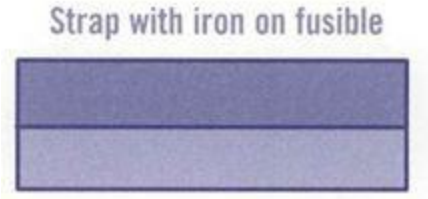
These are the notches to clip on your tote pattern (Rule 9 of the Cutting Rules):

- Tote bag at center for pocket placement
- Tote bag at top and bottom for handle placement
- Tote bag at the sides near the top and bottom
- Tote bag at the sides near the middle
- Tote bag lining at the sides near the top and bottom
- Tote bag lining at the sides near the middle
- Strap at top and bottom
- Pocket at center for pocket placement
- Pocket at the sides

Sewing Introductions

Step 1: Fusible Interfacing (optional)

Test a sample of the fusible interfacing on scrap fabric to see if you like the stiffness. For more stiffness add another layer of fusible. Iron the fusible interfacing to the wrong side of the tote bag body and straps.

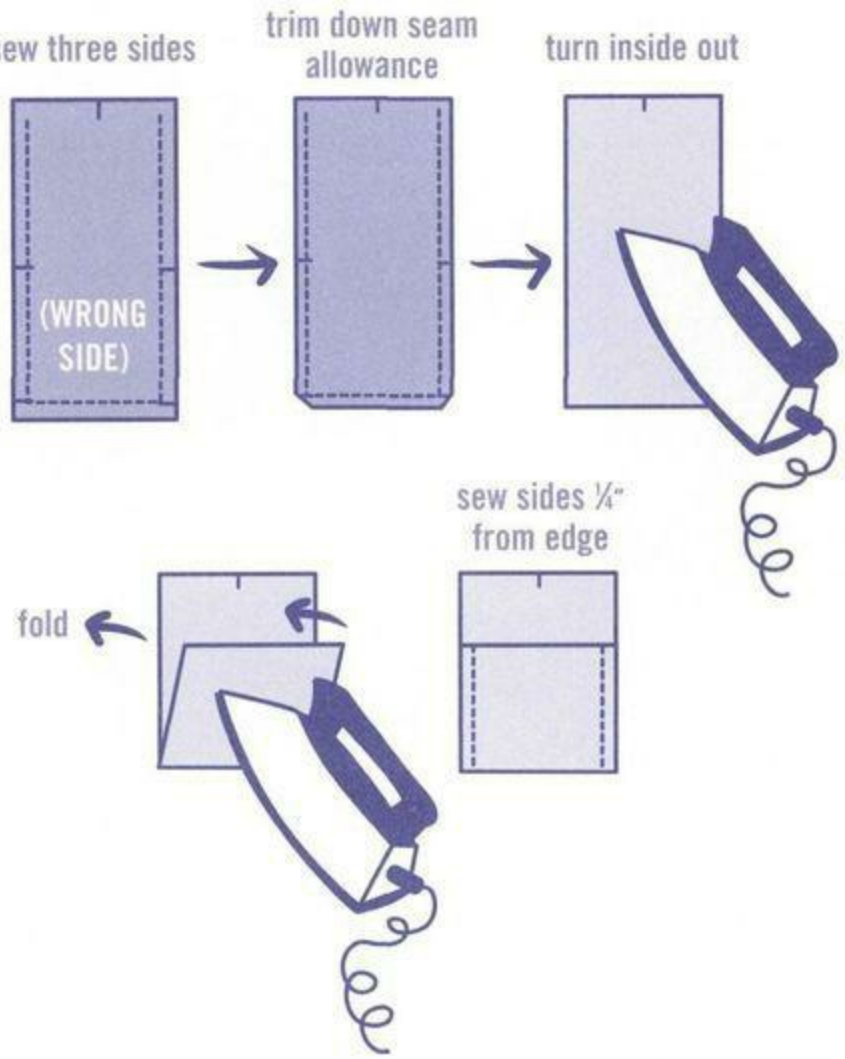


Step 2: Needlepunch (optional)

Pin the needlepunch to the wrong side of the tote bag fabric. Be sure to match the notches. Pin. Baste together using 3/8-inch seam allowance.

Pin the needlepunch to the wrong side of the strap. Note that the needlepunch will only cover half of the width of the strap. Machine-baste to one side using a 3/8-inch seam allowance. Trim the seam allowance.

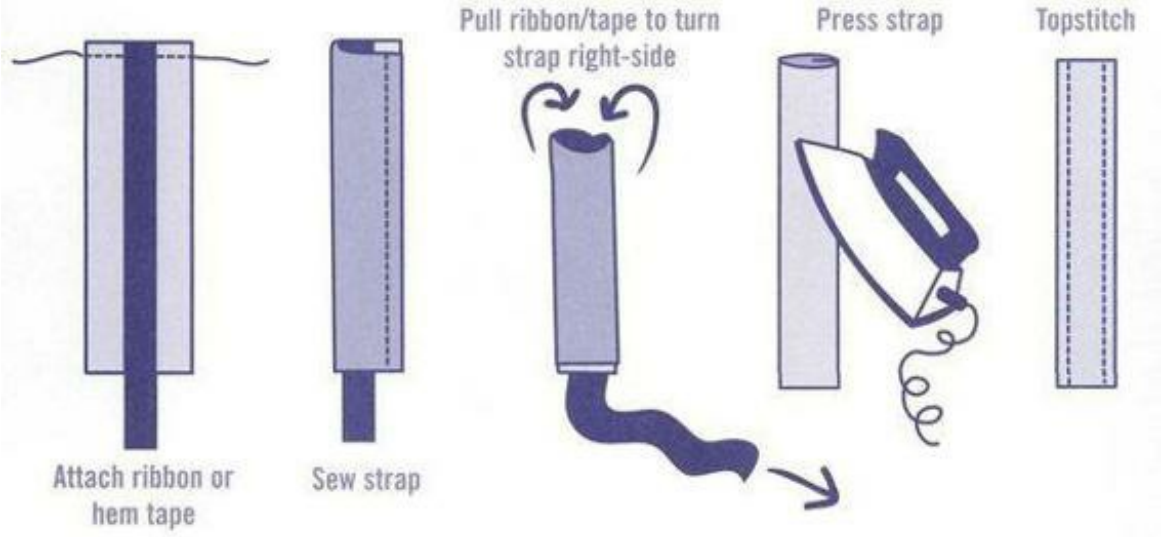
SEW THE POCKET, SEW UP FOLDED SIDES



Pin the pocket pieces together along the sides and the bottom. Keep the top, which has one notch at center, open. Sew the three sides.

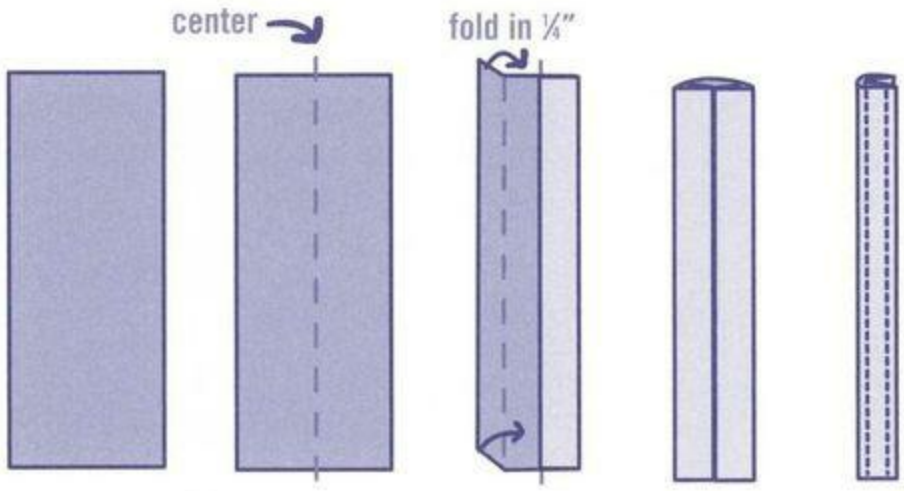
Trim down seam allowances to avoid bulk. Turn the right side out. Press. Fold up the pocket along fold line and press. Pin the edges of the pocket together and stitch closed ¼-inch away from edge of pocket.

SPECIAL TECHNIQUE TO TURN STRAPS

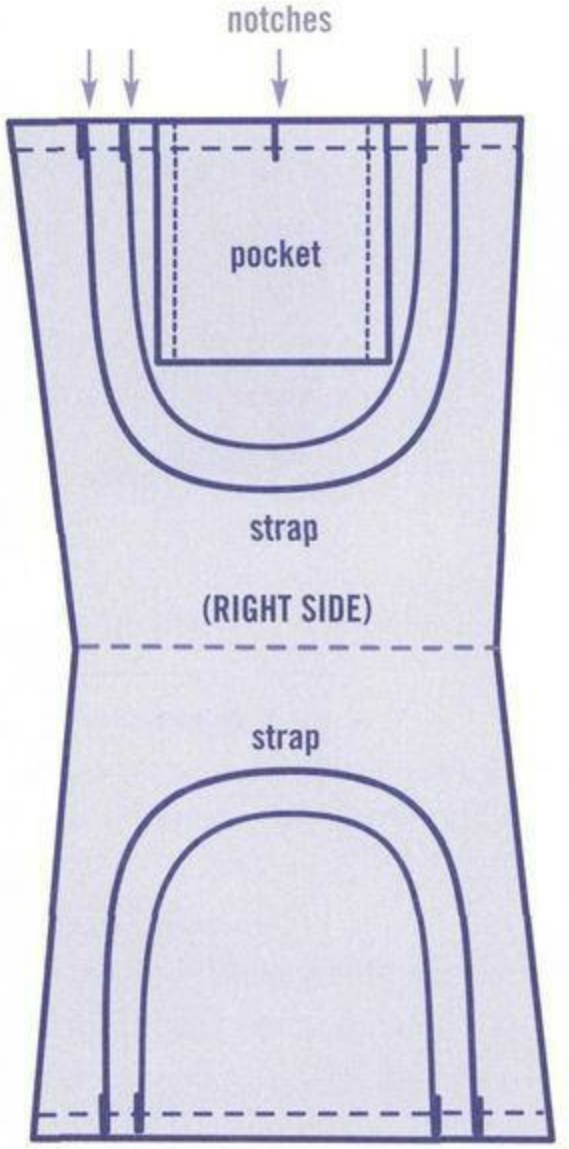


Sew the strip of ribbon or hem tape to the right side of the strap at one end. Fold the strap in half lengthwise, making certain that the ribbon/ hem tape lies along the inside edge. Stitch the strap closed, using a ½-inch seam allowance. Using the ribbon/hem tape, *pull the strap right side out.* Remove the ribbon/hem tape. Press. Topstitch either side of strap if desired.

NOTE: If you are using quite heavy fabric such as a thick canvas or denim, you will not be able to do the above as the fabric will be too bulky. Instead, just fold in ¼-inch on both sides of the strap length, press, fold in half, and then topstitch on each side.



ATTACH STRAPS



Pin the pocket to the tote bag so that the pocket faces the right side of the tote. Match the notches at the center of the pocket and the center of the top of the bag.

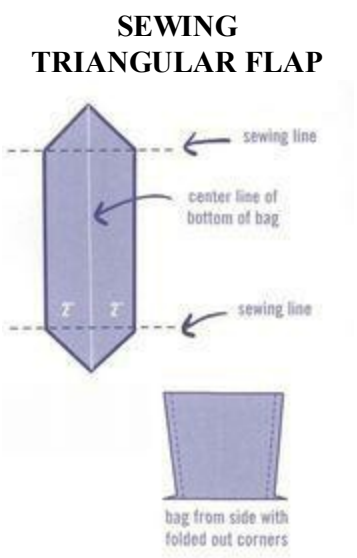
Pin the narrow edges of the strap to the edges of the bag. Make certain to match the strap to the notches on the bag.

Baste all pieces down at a 3/8-inch seam allowance.

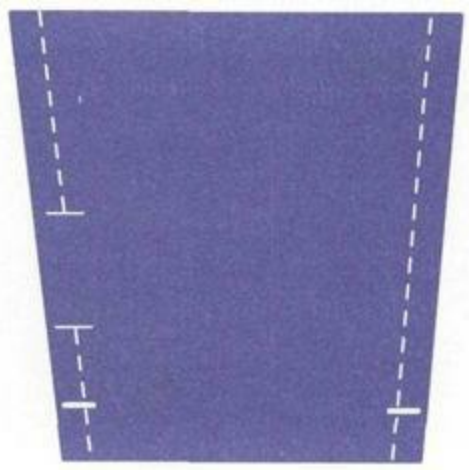
Fold the bag in half with the right sides together. Pin the sides closed. Sew from top to bottom (fold), matching the notches near the bottom. Press open the seam allowances.

Step 7: Making the Box

At the bottom of the bag where the notches are placed, fold out your corners so they form a triangular shape. It should measure 2 inches on either side of the side seam. Mark a line with tailor's chalk, pin, and sew along chalk mark. The point of your triangle is the bottom end of your bag.



Leave lining open on the side

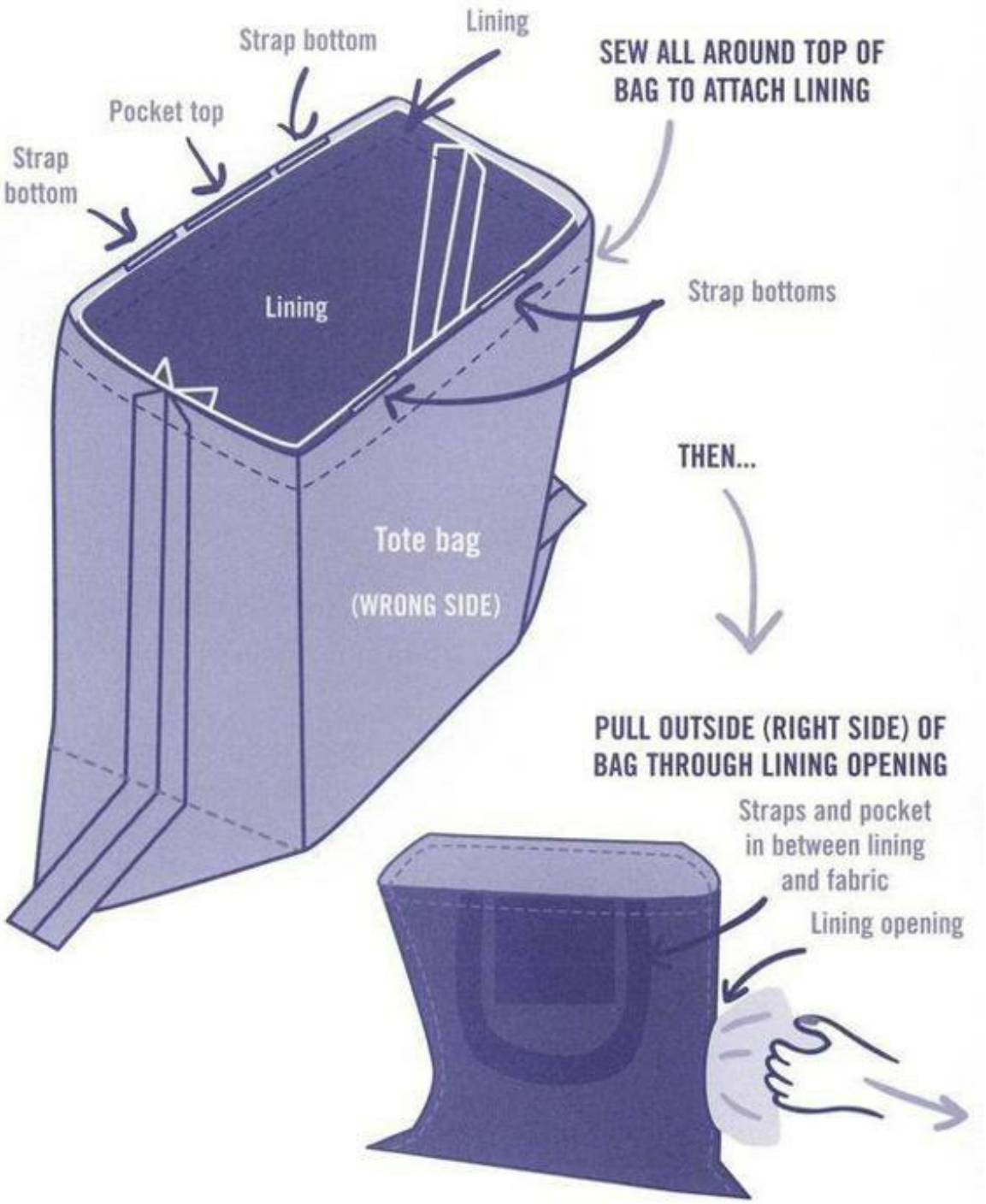


Fold the lining in half with the right sides together. Pin the sides closed. On one side sew from top to bottom (fold), matching the notches near the bottom. On the second side, leave a 4-inch-wide opening so that you can turn the bag right side out. This opening must be between the top of the lining and the notch near the bottom. Press open the seam allowance.

Repeat Step 7 on lining.

Step 9: Assembly

With the right sides together, insert the lining into the tote bag. Pin along the top, matching raw edges, side seams, and notches. Sew at a 5/8-inch seam allowance. Pull the lining out of the bag. Turn it right-side out. Stitch the opening closed near the edge.

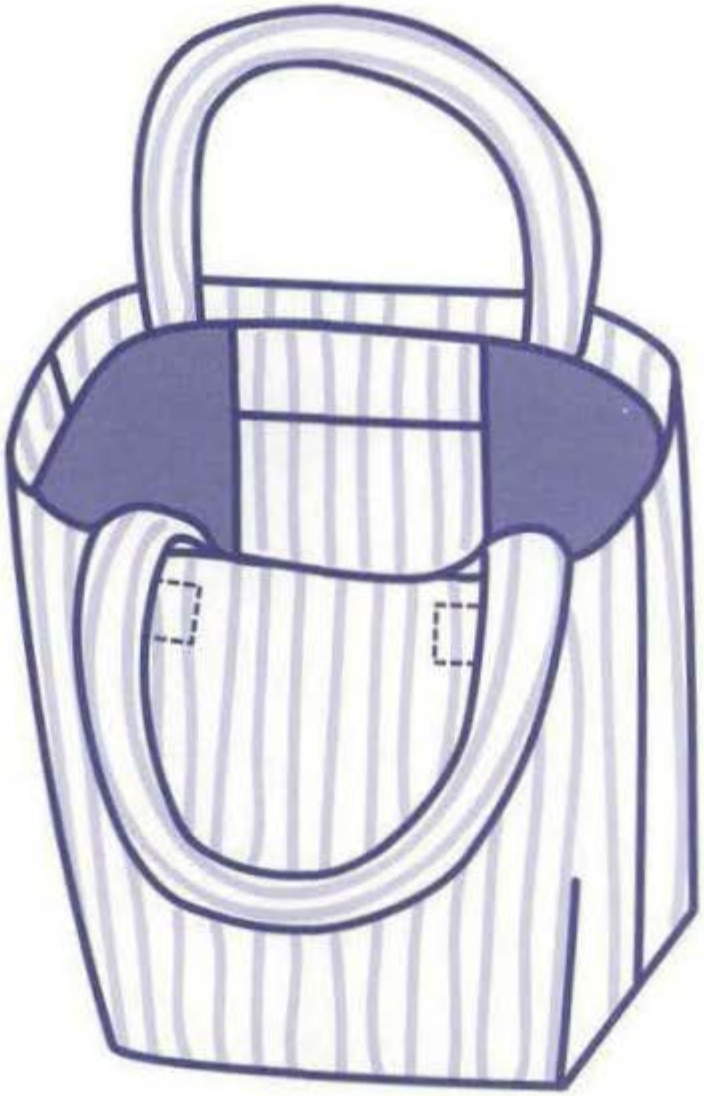


Insert the lining into the tote bag. Be sure to push the lining all the way down to the bottom of the bag. One-half inch to 1 inch of the tote fabric will fold into the interior of the bag. Make sure that margin is even. Press. Pin.

Option A:
Topstitch around the top of the bag, % inch around the top.

Option B:
Using tailor's chalk and a ruler, mark a 1-inch square at the base of each of the straps. Stitch each strap down along the chalk mark.

FINISHED TOTE!



Chapter 8

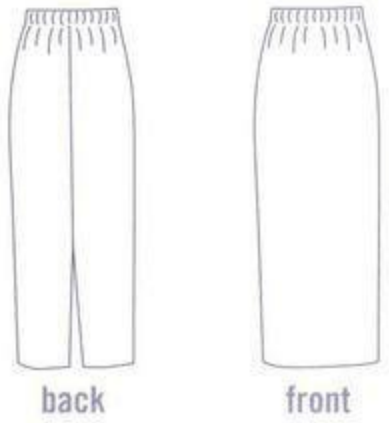
Go to It: HOW TO MAKE A SKIRT

In addition to the pattern in the back of the book and your survival kit basics, you will need:

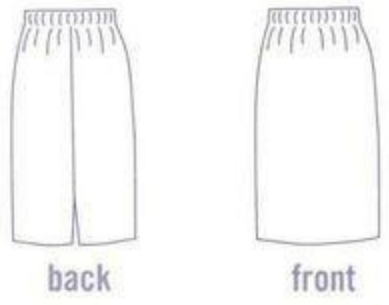
- To take your waist and hip measurements in order to use the following chart to determine your size and the amount of fabric you'll need (if you need to review how to take your measurements See Here)
- 1 yard of 1-inch-wide nonroll elastic
- All-purpose thread to match

Once you have your waist and hip measurements, look at the size chart on the next page. First, decide which length of skirt or view you would like to make.

VIEW #1: LONG SKIRT



VIEW #2: SHORT SKIRT



Size Chart

SIZE	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30
WAIST	24"	25"	26"	27"	28"	30"	32"	34"	36"	38"	40"	42"	44"	46"
HIP	33½"	34½"	35½"	36½"	38"	40"	42"	44"	46"	48"	50"	52"	54"	56"
VIEW 1 SKIRT	Total yardage of fabric													
45" width of fabric	1¾	1¾	2¼	2¼	2¼	2¼	2½	2½	2¾	2¾	2¾	3	3	3
60" width of fabric	1⅜	1⅜	1½	1½	1½	1½	1½	1½	2¼	2¼	2¼	3	3	3
VIEW 2 SKIRT	Total yardage of fabric													
45" width of fabric	1¼	1¼	1⅜	1⅜	1½	1½	1¾	1¾	2	2	2	2¼	2¼	2¼
60" width of fabric	1	1	1¼	1¼	1¼	1¼	1¼	1¼	2	2	2	2¼	2¼	2¼

Then, find the hip measurement on the chart that is closest to your true hip measurement. When in doubt, always go larger in size. Remember you can always take it in, but you cannot add fabric after you cut. Once you've found your hip measurement, go to the top of the chart, and you will see your size. (Your hip measurement, rather than your waist measurement, is most important because the skirt must slide over your hips.) Make sure to cut all the pattern pieces carefully following the outline on the pattern that matches your size.

Now that you know your size and which length of skirt you'd like to make, use the chart to determine how much fabric you should buy, depending on the width of the fabric you are going to use. If your width is less that 60 inches wide (that is 48 to 58 inches), buy the amount listed for 45-inch-wide-fabric. It is better to have excess fabric than not enough.

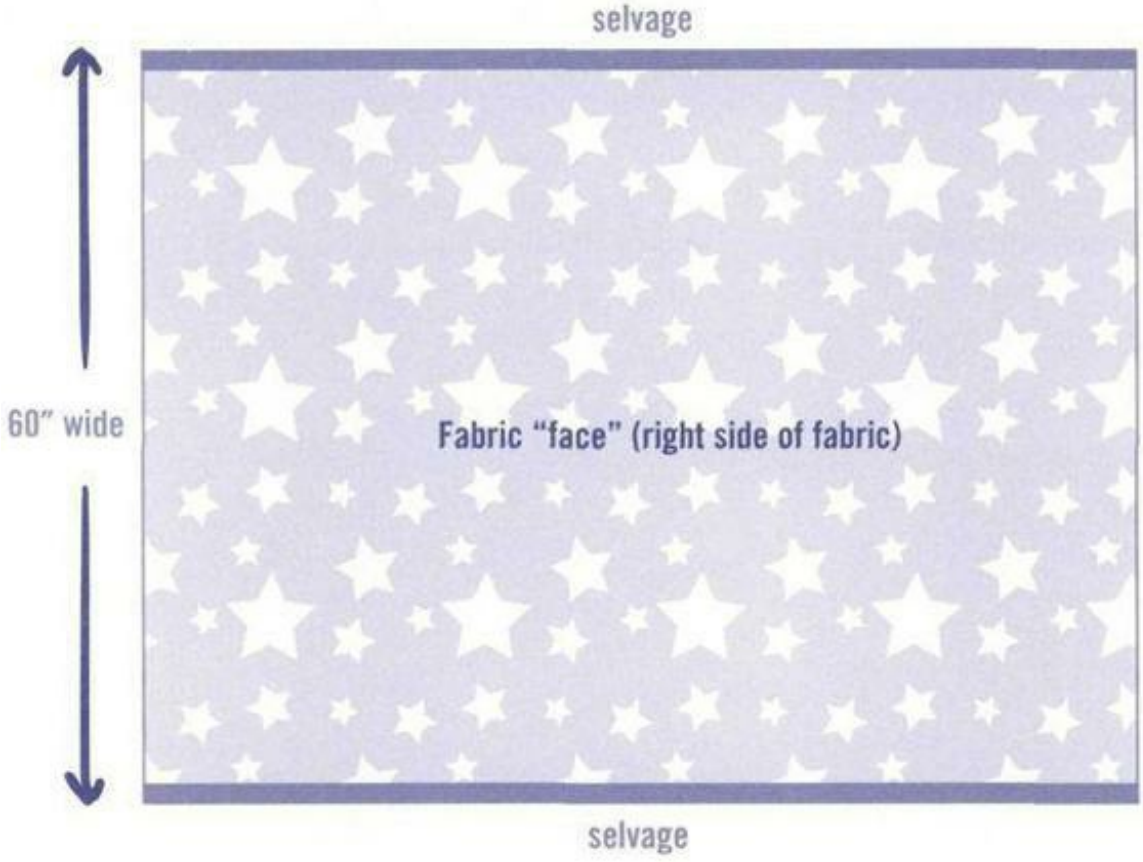
Layout

Use this guide to help you understand the Use this guide to help you understand the following skirt diagrams

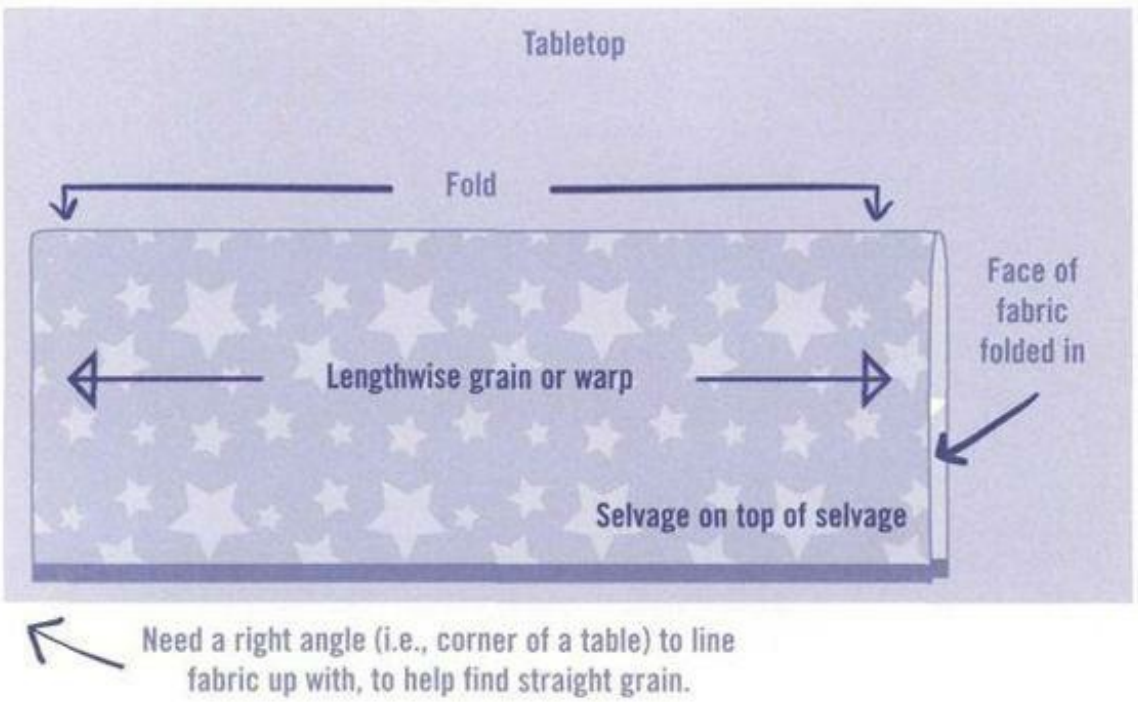
= FACE OR RIGHT SIDE OF FABRIC

= WRONG SIDE OF FABRIC

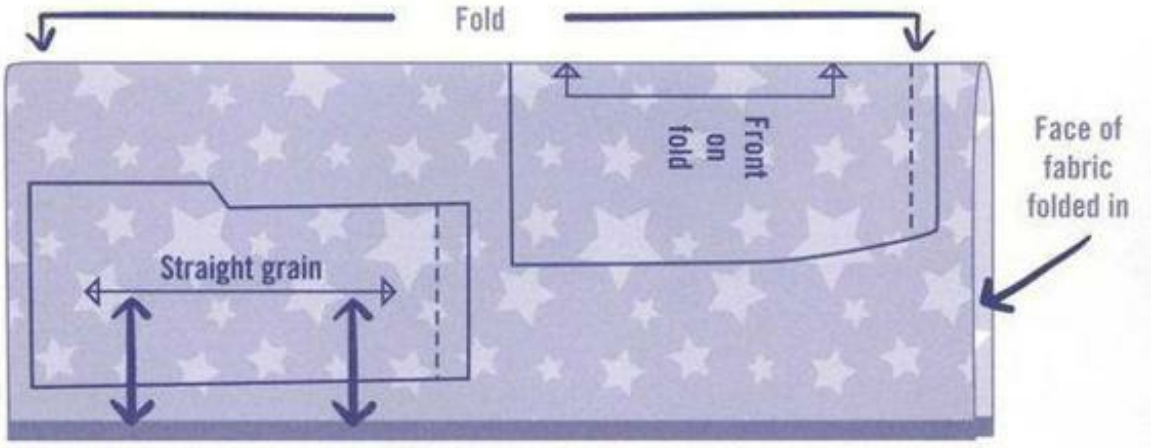
OPEN FABRIC AND FIND SELVAGE



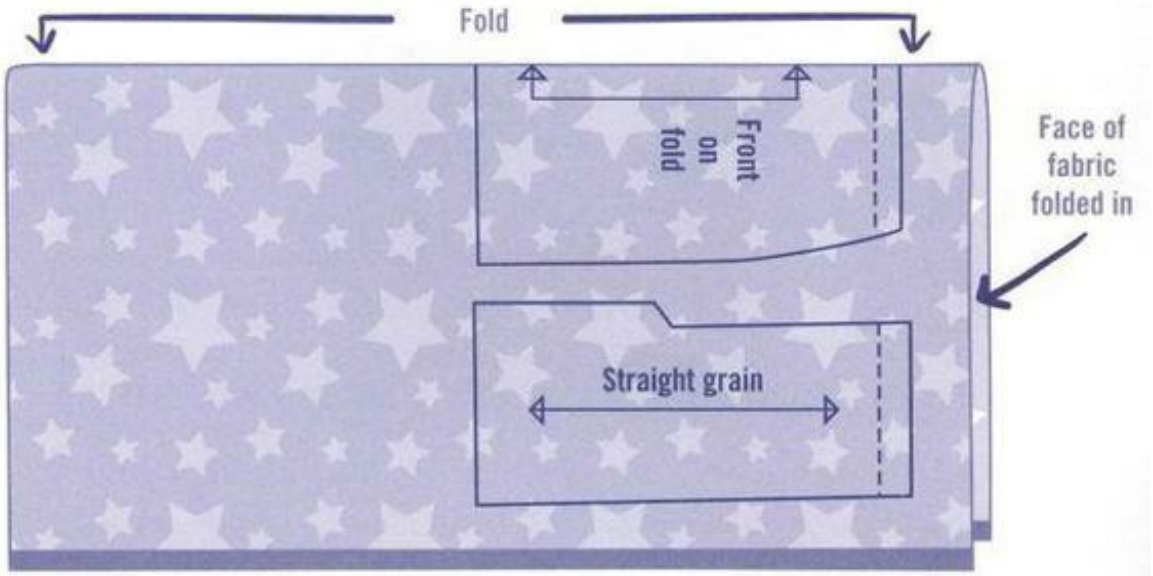
FOLD FABRIC IN HALF


Tabletop
Fold
Face of fabric folded in
Lengthwise grain or warp
Selvage on top of selvage
Need a right angle (i.e., corner of a table) to line fabric up with, to help find straight grain.

LAYOUT OPTION 1 (for either 45- or 60-inch-wide fabrics)

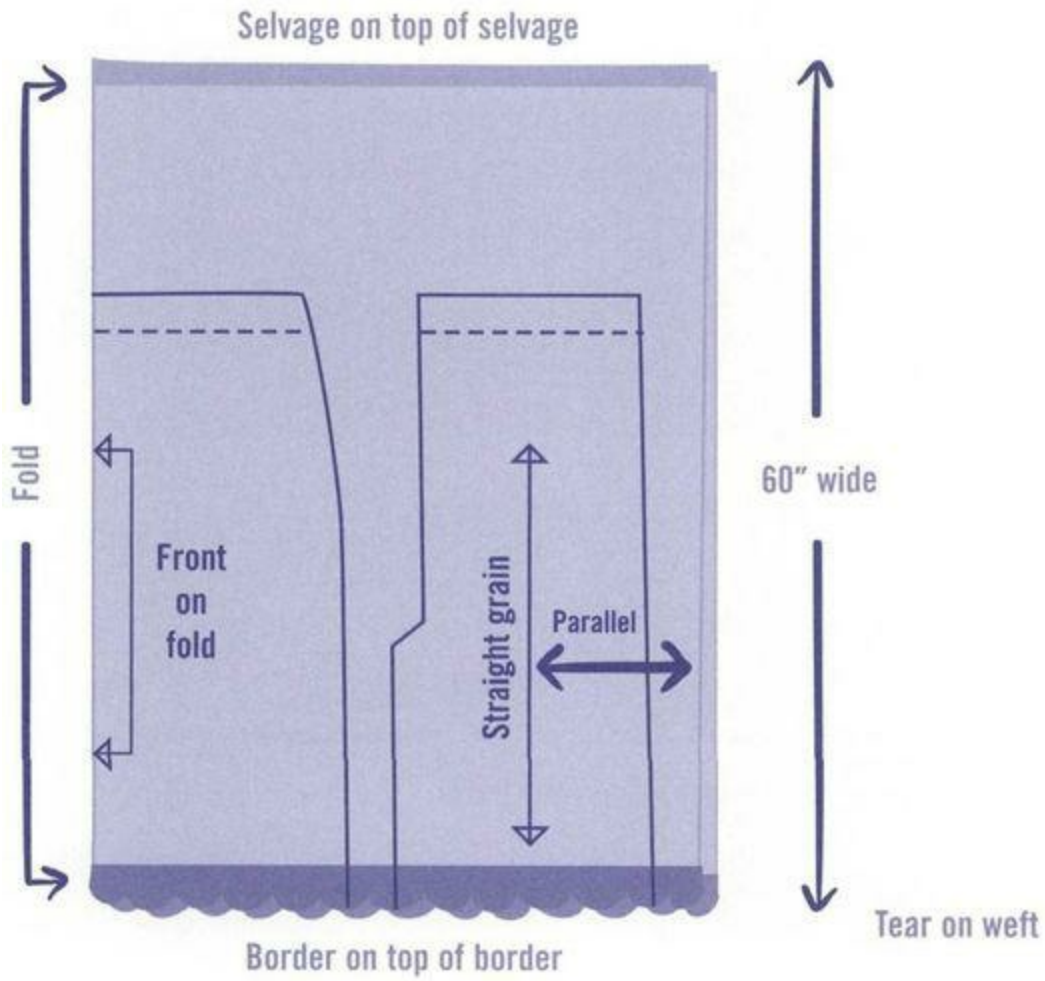


LAYOUT OPTION 2 (for 60-inch-wide fabrics)



This is the only time the skirt is cut opposite the length of the fabric.

LAYOUT OPTION 3 (for border prints, lace with scallop edging, and selvage-to-selvage stripes)



Now, cut out the pattern pieces (remember the Cutting Rules). These are the notches to clip on your skirt pattern (Rule 9):

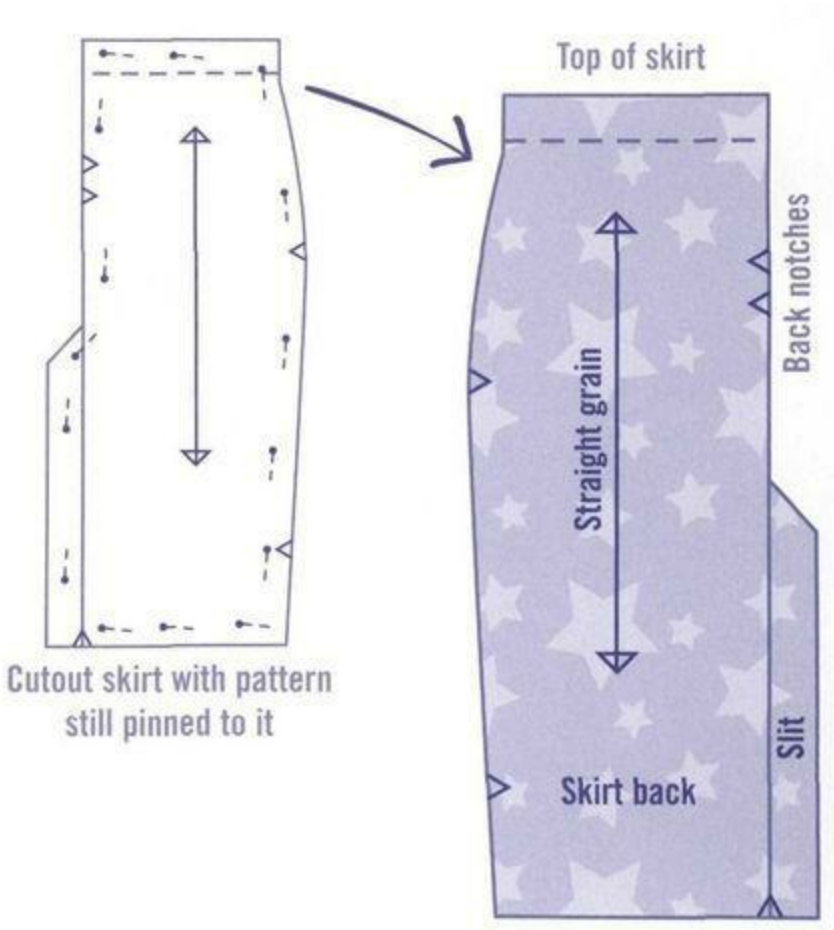
- Center front (at top of skirt only)
- Center back at the waistline
- Center back seam
- Hip
- Lower side seam (for long skirt only)
- Extension for the slit at the bottom back of the skirt

Sewing Instructions

Step 1: Method of assembly

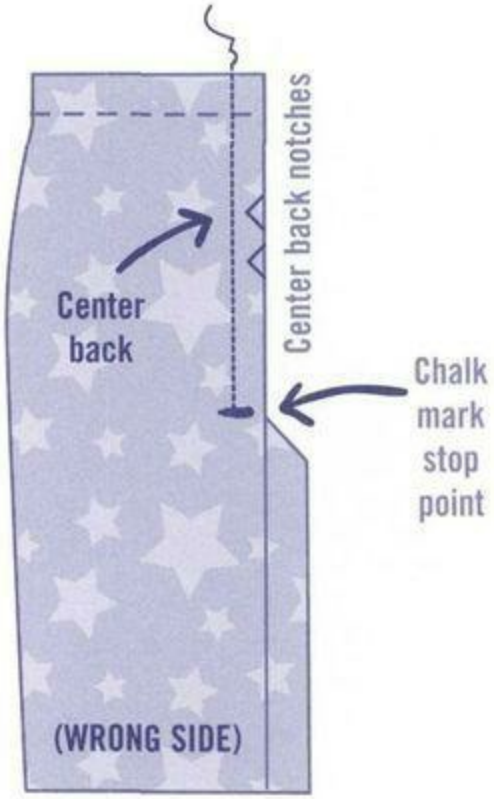
Unpin and remove the skirt back paper pattern and then flip the skirt. The reason for this is that when you are sewing, you always want the bulk of the fabric to the left of the needle.

UNPIN PATTERN PAPER AND FLIP SKIRT



Step 2: Sew backs together

Now place a few pins to hold the two backs together along the center back of the skirt. Make sure to match the center back "notches" you clipped. Remember you will sew the center back only to the slit. *Place a mark with chalk for your "sew stopping point*." Sew this seam first on a normal stitch length such as 2.5 starting at the top and ending at the stop point.

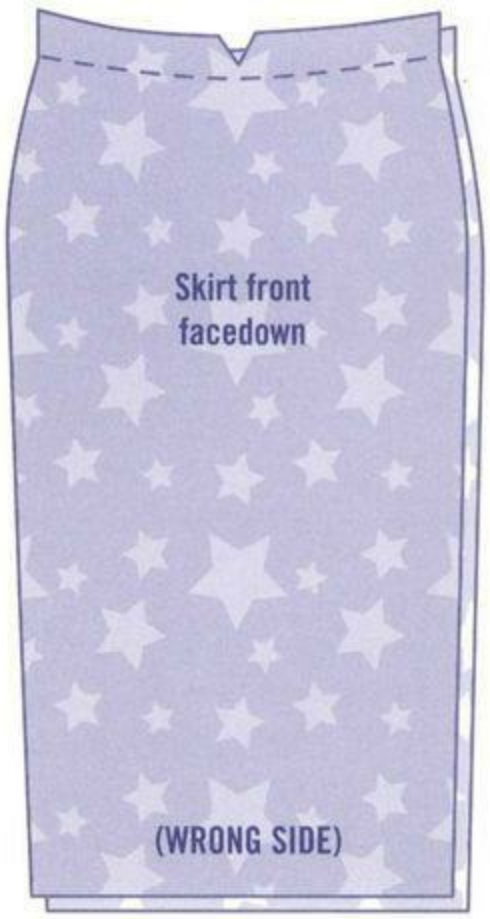


Step 3: Open back of skirt

Open the back of the skirt (after you have sewn the center backs together) and lay it on the table with the fabric *faceup*.

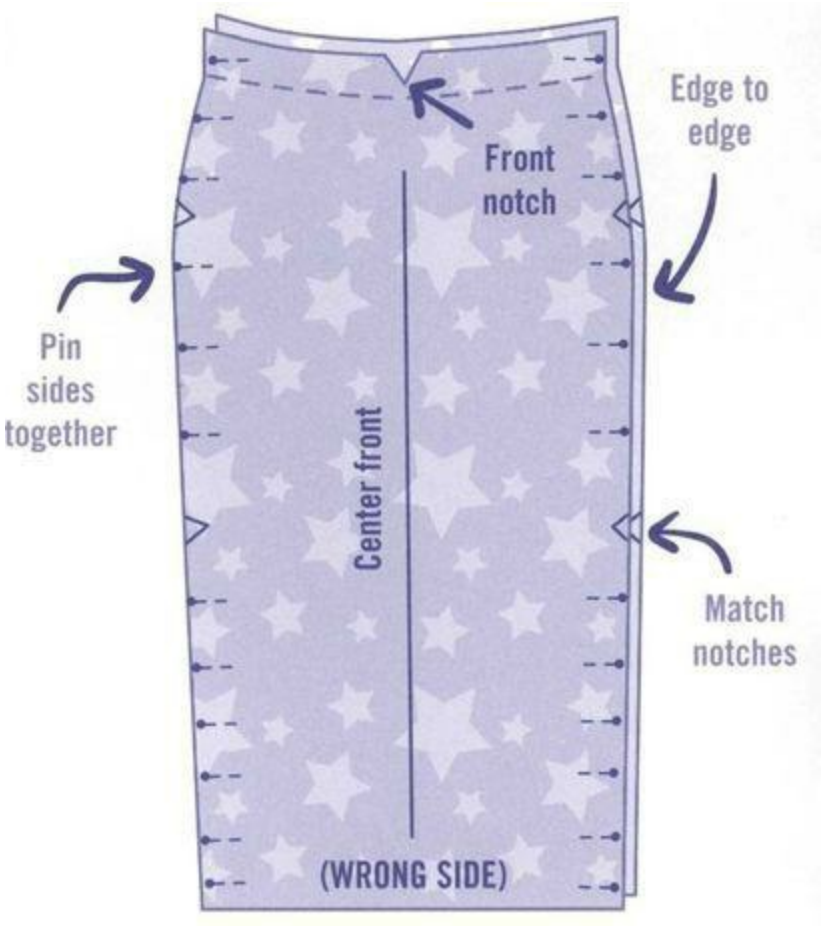
Step 4: Lay front on back

Unpin the pattern piece from the skirt front. Lay the front of the skirt on top of the skirt back, *facedown*. (Remember, you will sew your skirt together on the wrong side of the fabric.)



Step 5: Pin front to back at side seams

Pin the side seams together so that the side seams are *edge to edge and meeting* at the notches that you clipped. (Don't worry if the front is bigger than the back. It is supposed to be that way.)



Step 6: Sew side seams

Make sure to start sewing from the very top of the seams and sew straight to the bottom of the skirt, using your magnetic seam guide to help you sew a straight 5/8-inch seam allowance. The stitch length on your sewing machine should be set at the largest stitch. You are now sewing a "machine baste stitch." This is a temporary stitch. After you have custom-fitted your skirt (next chapter), adjust your stitch length back to a normal stitch length of 2.5.

Step 7: Sewing the seams

Sew together all three seams (center back and two side seams) of the skirt along the 5/8-inch seam allowance. Keep your eye on the seam guide to help guide you in sewing a straight line along the seams. SEW SLOOOOWLY! USE THE FOOT CONTROL ON YOUR SEWING MACHINE! (*Suggestion*: To get used to the machine, practice sewing on a piece of scrap fabric before you start sewing your skirt.)

Now you can try on your skirt by tying the elastic around your waist. You are ready to learn how to custom fit your skirt.

Chapter 9

Finishing Up Your Skirt

GETTING THE CORRECT FIT, PUTTING IN THE ELASTIC, PRESSING, AND HEMMING

Getting the Right Fit for You

There are four steps to follow.

Step 1: Putting your skirt on so it is hanging on you the correct way

Step 2: Pinning your taper line on one side of your skirt

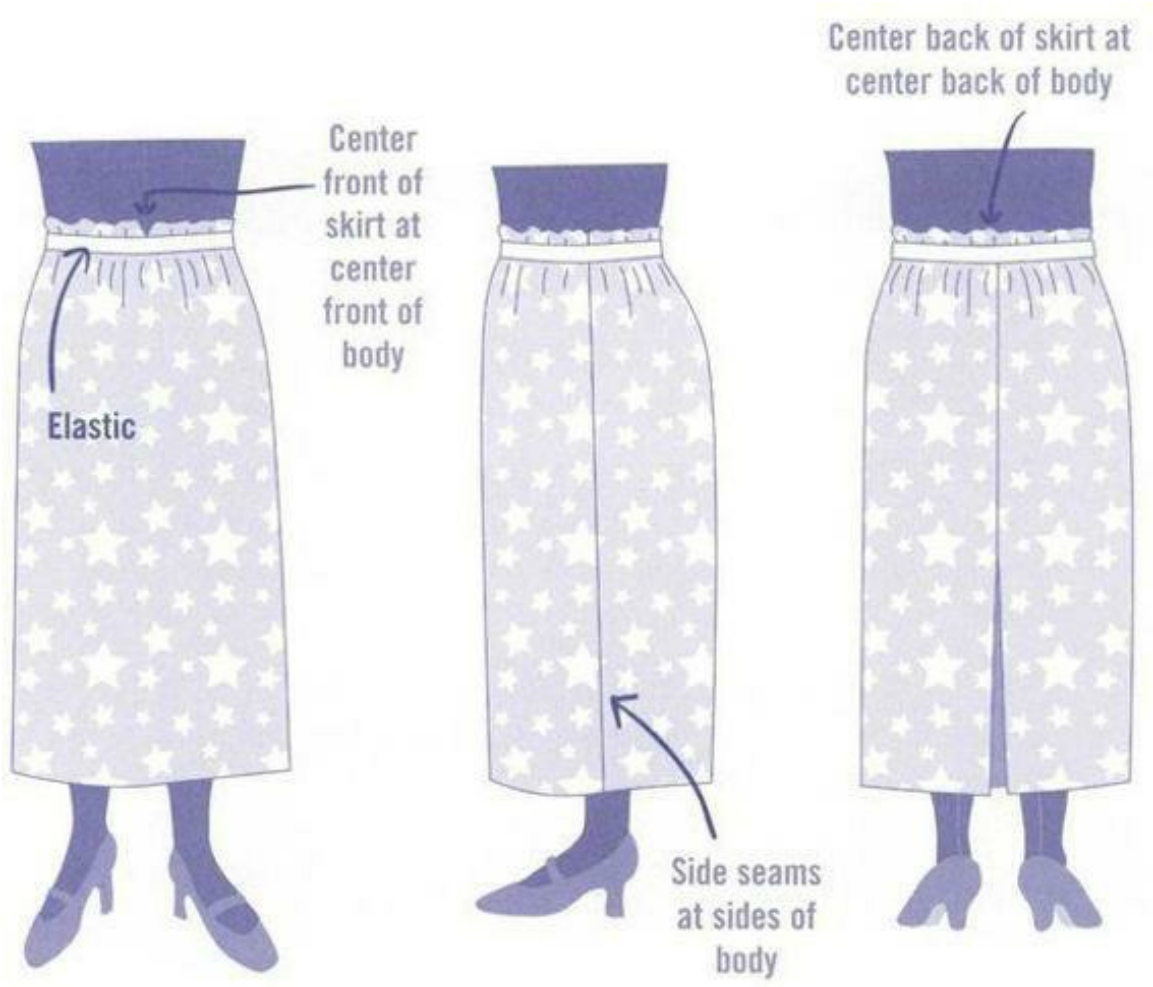
Step 3: Taking your skirt off and marking the pins that are your new taper line. Create your new taper line and trace it with a tracing wheel and tracing paper over to the other side of the skirt.

Step 4: Sewing up your skirt on the new taper line. Then check to see if the skirt fits the way you want before trimming away any of the excess fabric. All done!

Step 1: Putting your skirt on properly to check fit

In order to get anything to fit you properly you have to remove the clothes you're wearing and put on the item you have just sewn. Since the elastic is not in your skirt (yet), you are going to have to pin the elastic around your waist. Make sure the elastic fits comfortably. It should not be too loose or too tight. Then mark the location of the pin with tailor's chalk on the back and front of the elastic. When you pin the elastic on to your waistline, check to make sure it's not twisted.

Now make sure you have your skirt on properly. Check to see that the center front of the skirt is hanging from the center front of your body. Check to see that the center back is hanging directly on the center back of your body. Check to see that the side seams are on the sides of your body.

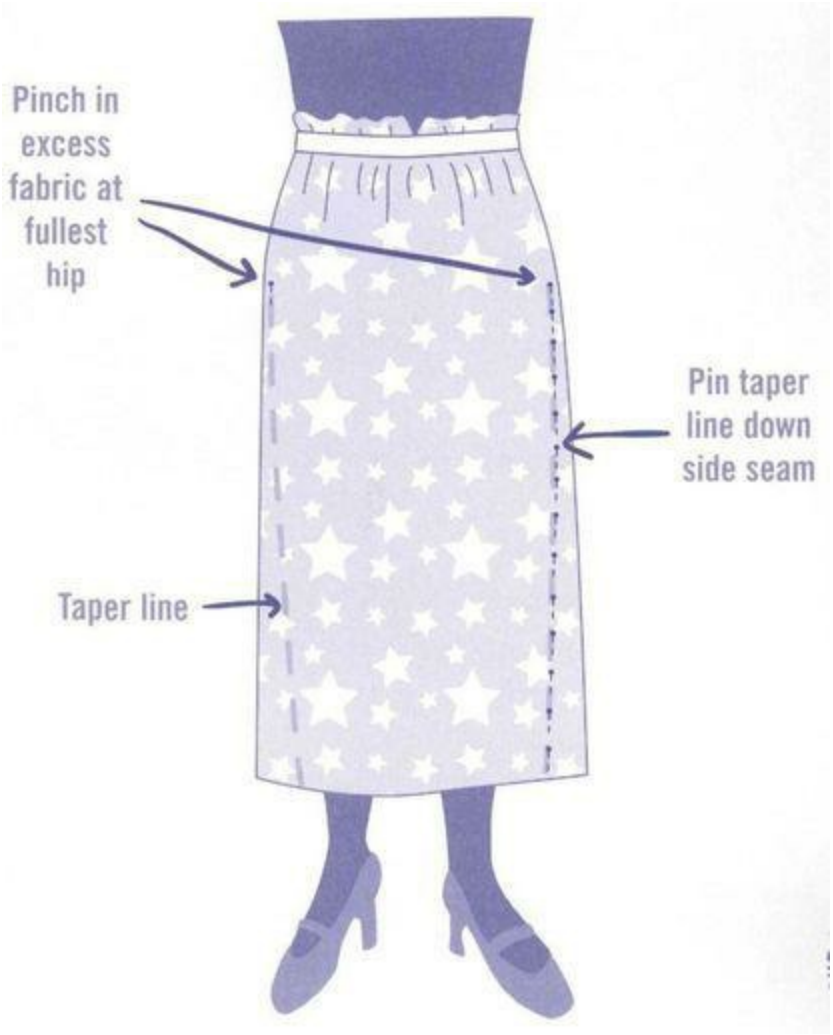

Center back of skirt at center back of body
Center front of skirt at center front of body
Elastic
Side seams at sides of body

Step 2: Creating a new taper line

Now it is time to look in the mirror and see how much you want to taper your skirt. Fit is a philosophy. What is too loose for one person is too tight for another. Remember that the more you taper the skirt, the more it becomes necessary to have the center back slit so that you can walk and step into a car or up onto a bus. Tapering is always flattering, even to a very curvaceous figure. There is nothing more unflattering than a dumpy-looking skirt.

After you have checked to see if you adjusted your skirt to hang properly, take a look in the mirror. Now take pins and with your fingers pinch in any excess fabric at your fullest hip. Turn sideways and look at the mirror. Make sure you are not pulling the skirt too tight over your hips and behind area. If you want a tight look, then adjust the pins at your hips for an even tighter fit.

Now face the mirror and look at the side seams of your skirt. Suddenly you will see an outline of your leg showing through the skirt. (In this next fitting technique, you will only pin your taper line on ONE side of your skirt.) Create your taper by following your leg. *Remember*: Don't pin so close to your leg that you will not be able to walk. Pin the taper line down the side seam of your skirt starting from the fullest hip where you put your first pin.



Once you have pinned your taper line, it is time to check the waist to see how much, if any, excess fabric you can take in and still pull your skirt down over your hips.

Unpin the elastic and using both hands at your side seams, pinch the sides of your skirt at the waistline and start to pull the skirt down over your hips. Can you pull it down too easily? Can you take off some fabric? Put a pin to mark that point.

Step 3: Marking your new taper line

Now that you have stepped out of your skirt, it's time to lay it on a table and mark with chalk where your pins are.

Turn your skirt inside out to the wrong side. Take your tailor's chalk and carefully rub a mark where the pins are in your skirt. Now you can remove the pins. The marks of the pin form your new taper line. Be careful to connect the chalk marks so they form a smooth new sewing line.

With your tracing paper and tracing wheel, trace the chalk marked line to the other side of your skirt. This method makes your new taper line (or anything else you may alter using this method) balanced and even on both sides. Start by folding the skirt in half with the two side seams of the skirt right on top of each other. Make sure the side seam that you ruled your new taper line is on top facing you. To be exact and prevent the seams from moving, pin the sewing lines of the two side seams together. Then slip a piece of tracing paper directly underneath all the pinned side seams.

Take your tracing wheel and roll it along the new taper line. Apply pressure to the tracing wheel so it marks the new taper line on the opposite side of your skirt. Unpin the skirt side seams. You should have the new taper line marked out.

Step 4: Sewing your new taper line

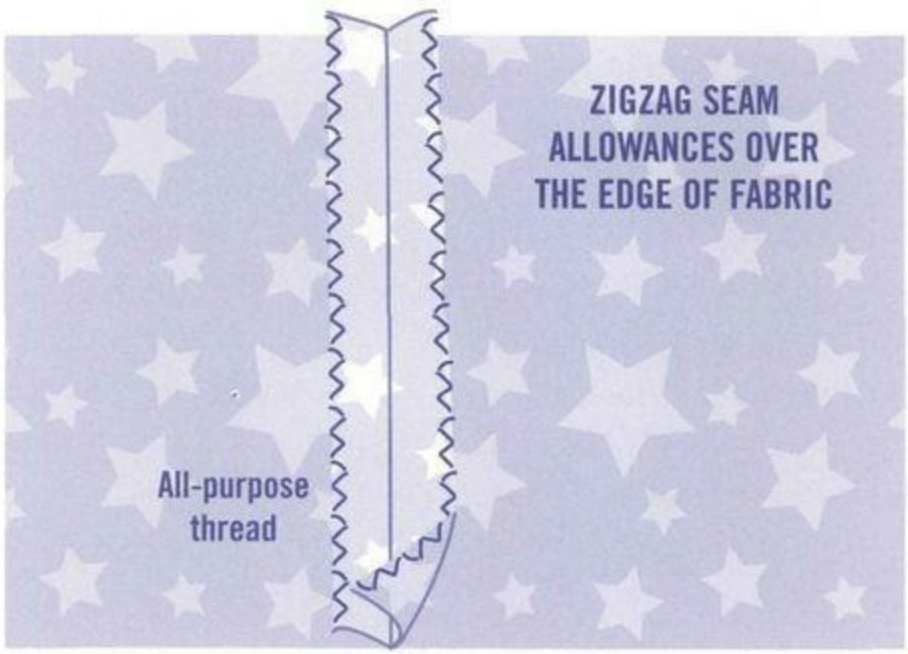
It's time to sew along these new taper lines. Remember, you don't need your seam guide since you are going to sew along the new taper lines you marked. (After you have sewn on your new taper lines always check to see if you like the new fit. Only then can you cut away the excess fabric.)

With your ruler follow along the new seam line you just sewed and mark a new seam allowance of Dinch. Trim the excess fabric away. You don't want any bulk along your seams.

Finishing Off the Seams of Your Skirt

Set your sewing machine to a zigzag stitch or an overcast stitch. Using a piece of scrap fabric, test the zigzag stitch width to see if you like the stitch closer together or wider apart. Some fabrics, such as chiffon or linen, will fray less with a closer zigzag; on others, such as wool or denim, a wider stitch works better. When sewing the zigzag stitch over the raw edges make sure to zig onto the fabric and

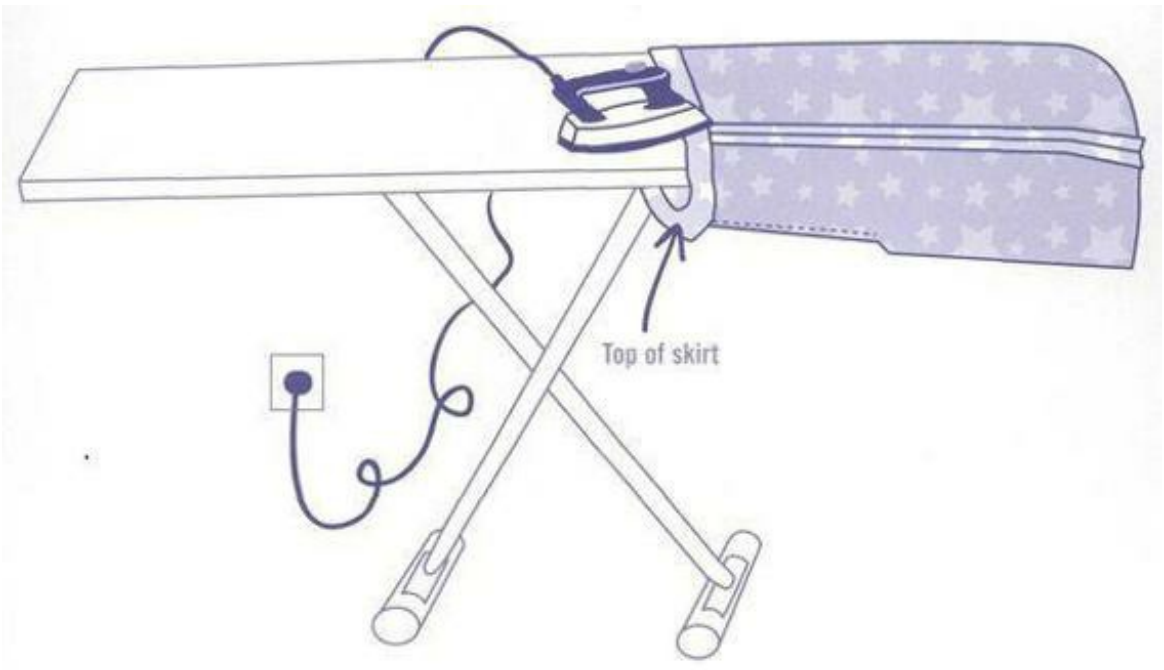
zag over the raw edge so that the threads on the sewing machine actually cover the raw edge of the fabric. Do this on all your raw seams so they don't fray away.



Putting the Elastic into Your Skirt

Fold back the top of your skirt at the fold line printed on your pattern. Your fold width is actually 2 inches wide. Press this 2 inches down toward the inside of your skirt so that it really forms a crease. You are now preparing the **casing**, which is what your elastic is going to be sewn into.

PRESS YOUR CASING

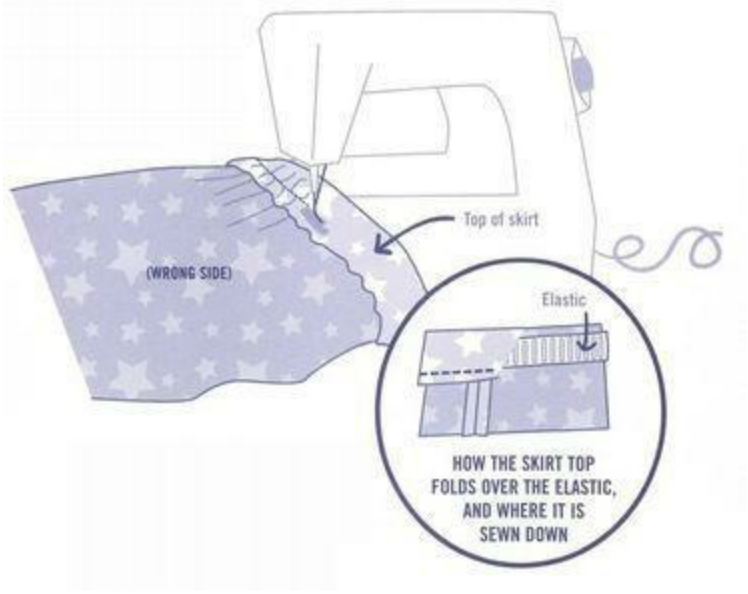


Make sure to sew your elastic together (to form a circle). Overlap the elastic, matching the chalk marks you made in your fitting. Sew across the elastic at least three times. This will make the elastic secure so it won't come apart. To sew in the elastic you must change your all-purpose foot to a zipper foot. A zipper foot helps you to get closer to the side of the elastic while sewing it in the casing.

Take the elastic and slip it around the pressed casing at the top of the skirt. Naturally the elastic will be smaller than the skirt. Make sure the elastic is placed inside the pressed casing close against the creased edge.

Start at a side seam of the skirt and insert the casing with the elastic into your sewing machine. Place the zipper foot along side the bottom edge of the elastic and begin to sew the elastic into the casing.

USING THE ZIPPER FOOT OF YOUR MACHINE, SEW THE ELASTIC INTO THE CASING OF THE SKIRT



As you sew along the elastic you will notice there is more skirt fabric than elastic. Keep sewing until you notice you have too much skirt fabric and not enough elastic. Then turn the sewing machine hand wheel so that the needle is fixed into the skirt. Pick up the presser foot lifter. Using your hands, hold the skirt casing and pull the elastic out toward you. You will see the skirt casing start to gather up behind the zipper foot but you will have enough elastic to continue to sew the casing until you have gone full circle around the skirt. After you've completed this, cut the loose threads and with both hands stretch the elastic to its fullest. This will even out the gathers all around the elastic waist. Now you are ready for the pressing and hem.

Pressing

Believe it or not the key to making your sewing projects look great is doing a careful job of pressing

all your sewn seams flat. If you take the time to do this properly, your project will look very professional. It's best to press the seams you've already sewn before hemming your skirt.

TOOLS

A steam iron. A good iron that has a lot of steam and is not light in weight is the best. Fill the iron with ½ cup water and turn the indicator to steam. After a few seconds check to see if the iron is creating steam. Most irons will spit out water when they are just turned on or off, so be careful to not let it spit water on your fabric. Always iron a scrap piece of the fabric you are going to press first to make sure that you have the right heat setting so you will avoid damaging your fabric or burning a hole in it.

A manila file folder. Cut it into a strip 2 inches by 10 inches. This strip of hard paper works well to make your seams lay flat. Just insert the 2-by-10-inch strip of file folder paper in between your seam allowance and the body of your garment. The paper also aids in protecting the body of your skirt from getting an imprint of the seam allowance.

THE PRESSING STEPS

Turn your skirt to the wrong side. Always start to press out your seams flat on the ironing board. Do not lay your skirt on the double on top of the ironing board. Pull it onto the ironing board so you can press one seam at a time. Now gently go over each seam until it lays crisp and flat.

PUCKERS ON YOUR SEAMS

Sometimes the seams you sew on your garment will pucker. There are many reasons why this happens —a dull needle, improper tension on your sewing machine, or you might be pulling your fabric as you sew. These puckers can easily be pressed out by first laying the seams on the double one on top of the other. Steam press the seams flat to smooth out the puckers, then press the seams flat open.

A GOOD STEAMING TECHNIQUE TO USE ON CORRECTIONS OR ALTERATIONS

If you have to rip out a seam, pick it open with your seam ripper and steam those seams flat on the ironing board. Avoid stretching the picked-open seams. By carefully pressing the seams flat you will shrink the ripped-open seams back into place and make it easier to sew those seams together again.

Hemming

When you look at the clothes in your closet you will notice that the **hem** on each garment in sewn in a different way. For instance, a denim skirt usually just has a turned-up hem with a lockstitch on it. Skirts that are made out of knit fabrics sometimes have two stitches running parallel to each other. The type of hem you use will depend on your fabric.

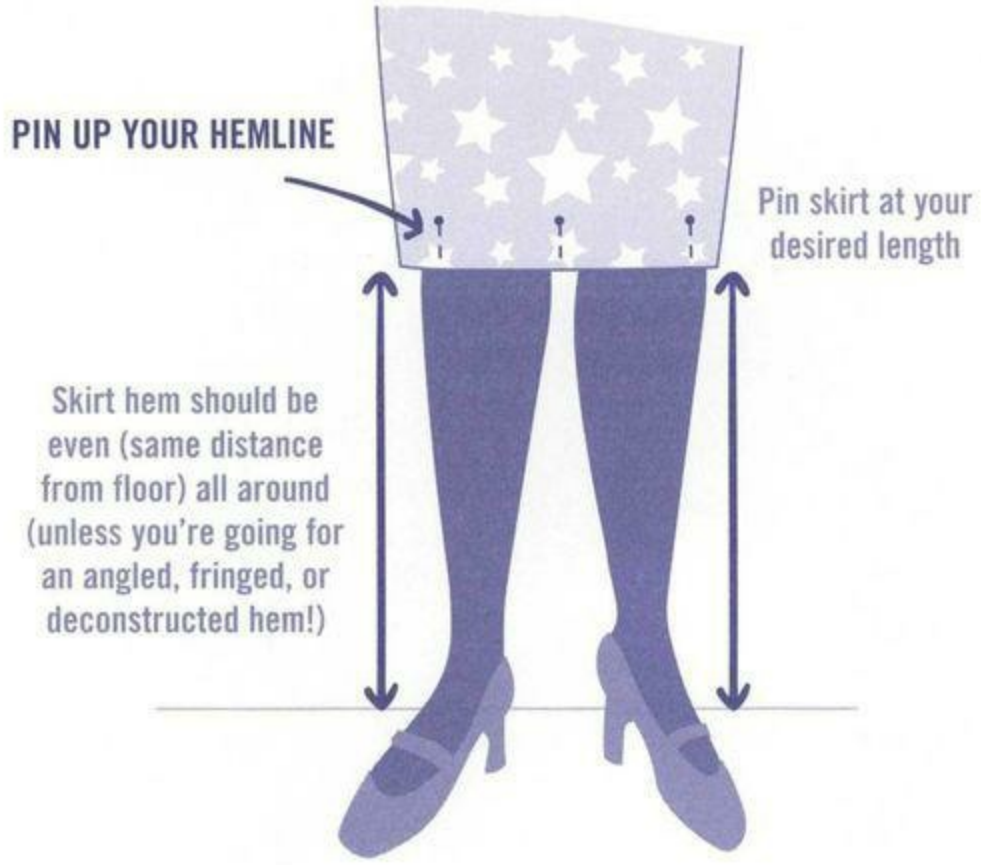
MARKING YOUR HEMLINE

Even though you may be home alone you will be able to mark a hemline on most styles of skirts and pants. The ones you will need assistance on are the bias skirt and the circle skirt.

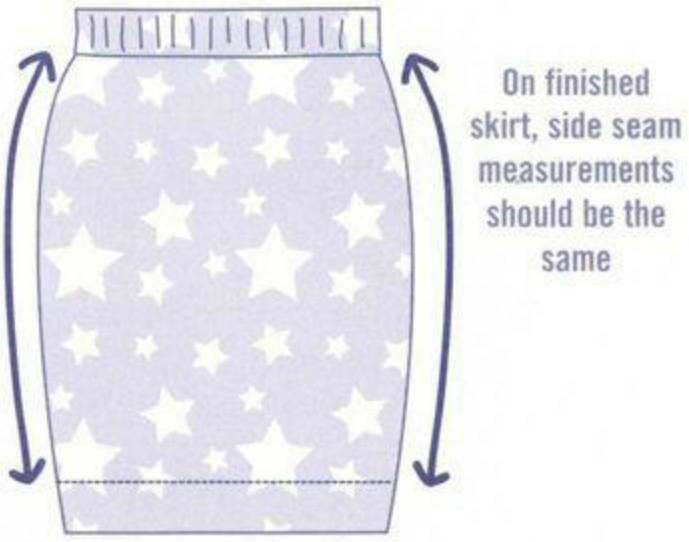
Step 1: Put your skirt on and adjust it so it is sitting on your body properly, the side seams on the sides of your body and the center back of your skirt resting on the center back of your body.

Step 2: Stand in front of the mirror with a few pins in your hand. Just bend up the amount of hem that you think will look right and pin it up. All you need is two pins to hold your hem in place. Now have a look in the mirror to see if you like the length. Once you have decided on the proper length make sure to keep the pins in and take the skirt off. Lay the skirt down on a table, taking care that it lays smooth and flat.

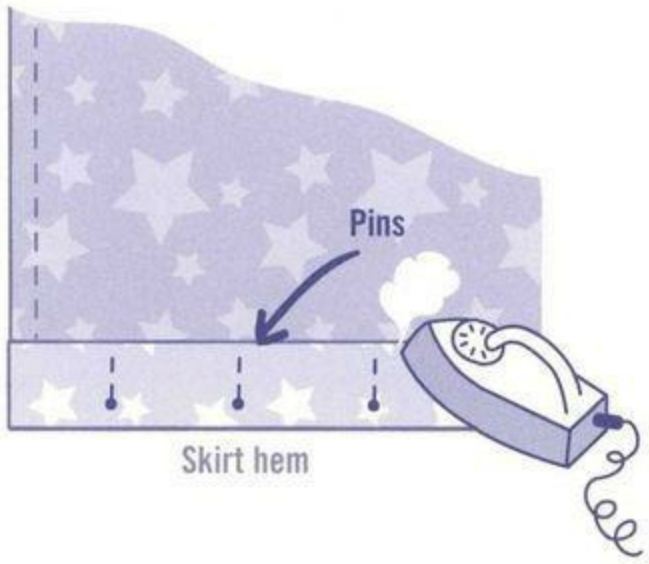
Step 3: Using a tape measure, start from the top of the waistline and measure down to the bottom of the hem that you marked with pins. Using the measurement you took, move along the front of the skirt and pin up the hemline.


PIN UP YOUR HEMLINE
Pin skirt at your desired length
Skirt hem should be even (same distance from floor) all around (unless you're going for an angled, fringed, or deconstructed hem!)

Now you can bend under the hem on the wrong side of your skirt and pin. Turn your skirt on the side, matching side seams, then check to see if the seams are even. Your posture has a lot to do with how a skirt hangs on you. So if you tilt forward or have a more sizable behind, your hemline might pick up higher in the back. You can compensate for this by dropping your hemline by ½ inch in the back.



PRESSING THE HEMLINE



After you have marked your hem and checked to see if it is even, you can press your hemline. Make sure not to press the pins that are holding your hem in place.

PREPARING THE HEM

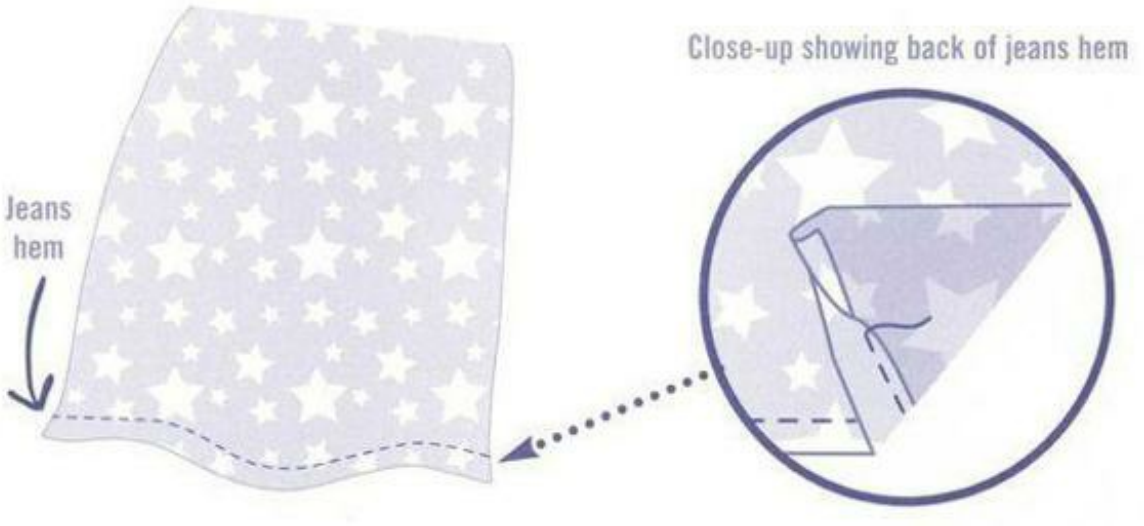
On the inside of your skirt it is important that your hem be trimmed off to an even length. A standard hem should be approximately 2½ inches wide. Sometimes you might not have enough left over; if this happens, then even it off to the width of fabric that you have left.

At this point you should decide what kind of hem to use on your skirt. On a dressmaker hem, which is 2½ inches wide, you will want to sew on **hem tape**. On a sportswear hem you can leave 1¼ inches. On sheer fabrics you can zigzag the edge of your hem or use a **rolled hem** finish on your overlock machine. In this case, you will need no extra seam allowance. This is also true if you do a **baby hem** with a rolled hem foot. Cut the hem where you marked your hemline.

It is very easy and fun to use a zigzag stitch on your sewing machine, but first experiment on a piece of scrap fabric from your skirt to get the right zigzag stitch width and length. On your sewing machine, set your stitch pattern to zigzag. Then adjust the stitch down to a small length. Test your stitch before sewing it on the bottom edge of your skirt. It is important to make sure you zig in the skirt and zag over the raw edge of the hem. It will make a dainty finish and look especially nice on silk or chiffon.

Another hemming option is to sew a baby hem. There are two ways to do this. The first way is to leave approximately % inch for the hem. Carefully press and fold the hem by turning the raw edge up and then turn under so that the raw edge is hidden. The hem should be pressed toward the wrong side of the skirt. Keep turning and pressing the hem, making it very small, no larger than ¼ inch. Do this with an iron on the ironing board. Sew the pressed hem using a normal size straight stitch on your sewing machine. The second way is to use a baby hem foot on your sewing machine. This technique takes some practice in using the foot to turn your baby hem.

For a "jeans hem," leave 1-inch for your hem. Carefully press up and under your hem so the raw edge doesn't show. It should end up being approximately ½ inch when pressed. Press the hem toward the wrong side of your skirt. This hem is prepared and sewn just like the baby hem but will finish ½ inch wide.

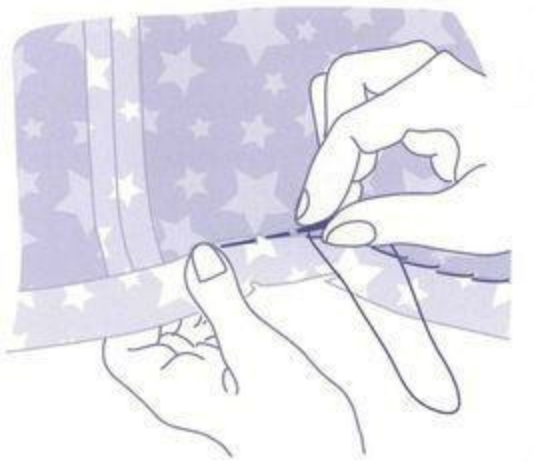


Finally, in order to even off the inside of your hem, use a ruler and measure around from the bottom of the hemline up 2½ inches (or whatever width you decided on for your hem). Mark with marking chalk as you go around the skirt. Then cut off the excess fabric.

HEMMING BY HAND

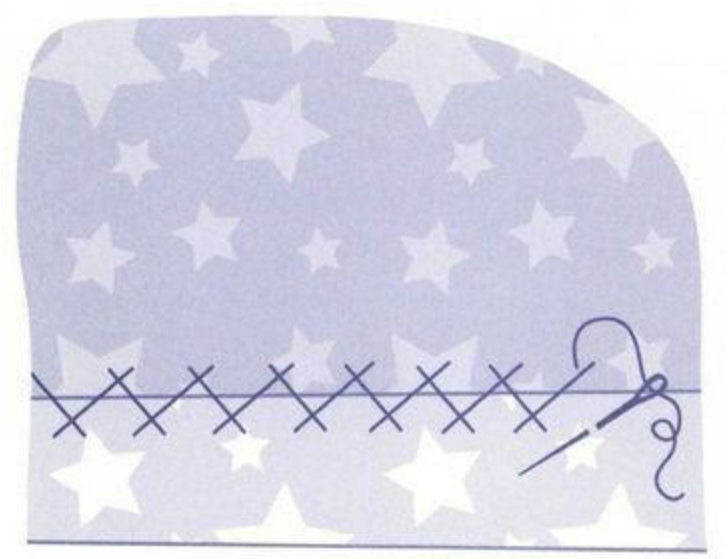
It's always good to know how to sew a hand hem. A hand-sewn hem is called a **blind hem stitch**. As the name implies, you shouldn't be able to see the stitches on the right side of your skirt. Thread your needle using only a single thread. The thread should be a little longer than the length of your arm, otherwise you might get it tangled. Make a tiny knot at one end of your thread. With your needle pick up a little more that three threads in your skirt. Then holding you needles on a diagonal, pick up a few threads of your hem at the very top. Pull your needle and thread through. Continue doing this until you go all around your skirt hem to reach the point where you started. End your hem by sewing a **backstitch**, two tiny stitches one on top of the other. Cut your thread.

BLIND HEM STITCH



A **catch stitch** is another basic hand stitch. Sew using the same basic principles above, except crisscross the thread.

CATCH STITCH

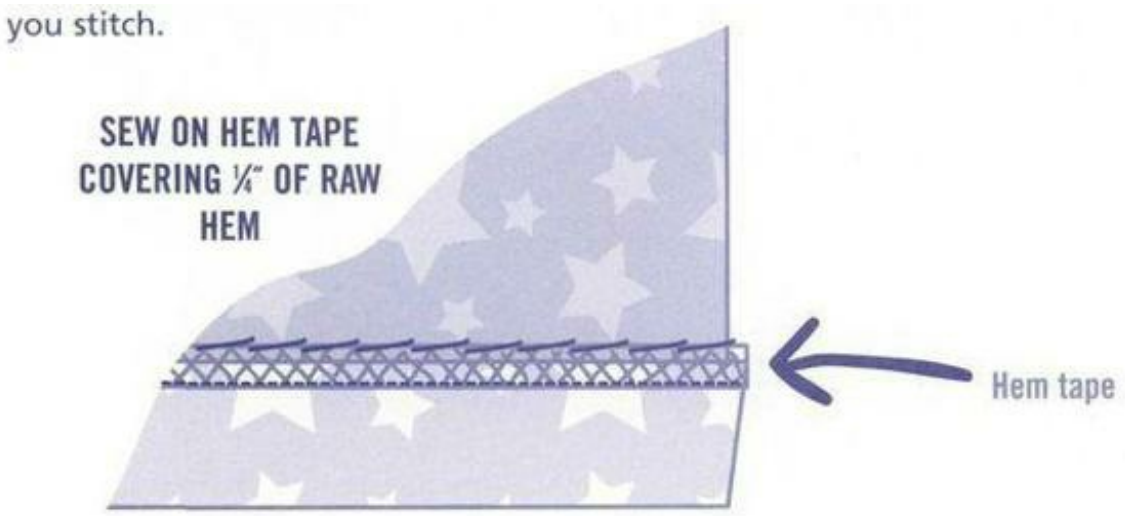


FINISHING WITH HEM TAPE

Hem tape is a real dressmaker finish that covers up the raw edge on your hem. If you are in a hurry you can always use iron-on hem tape and just press it on to cover the raw edge of your hem. But if you have the time, here's the real deal:

Stitch the seam tape along its edge covering ¼ inch of the raw edge of the hem. Allow the binding to lay smoothly. Do not pull or ease while you stitch.

SEW ON HEM TAPE COVERING ¼" OF RAW HEM



Finishing the Slit in Your Skirt

This technique saves time, holds back the facing for the slit in your skirt, and creates a crisp finish without even sewing. If you fuse in the tape properly it will withstand any washing or dry cleaning done to your skirt.

Cut two stripes of fuse tape the same length as your slit opening. Fuse tape is often called Stitch Witchery®. Pull the back of your skirt which has the unfinished slit onto the ironing board. Make sure your skirt is on the wrong side. Then press back the facings toward the inside of the skirt. Take one strip of fuse tape and insert it in between the facing and the skirt. Make sure to lay the fuse tape carefully down and right up into the pressed crease line of the facing. Now press the facing again, taking your time to give the fuse tape a chance to glue. Do the same to the other side of the slit.

Fuse tape

Based on classes taught by Elissa K. Meyrich at her sewing school

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Glossary

Adjustment line A double line printed on a pattern to indicate where to take in/out and lengthen/shorten.

All-purpose foot The foot on your sewing machine used most frequently for general use on most sewing projects.

Alter To change the fit of a garment or pattern.

Baby hem A small hem approximately ¼ inch wide, often used as a hem finish on skirts, tablecloths, and napkins. It can be made by attaching a baby hem foot to the sewing machine.

Backstitch Often called a backtack. A backstitch is used to lock off the beginning and end of a hand sewing. A backstitch can be used in a row of stitches by hand to mend a seam or to imitate machine sewing.

Basting A temporary stitch that can be either hand or machine sewn to hold fabrics in place temporarily. A machine basting is used to sew up a garment for a fitting.

Bias A diagonal line across the fabric. "True bias" is the diagonal edge formed when fabric is folded so that the lengthwise and crosswise grains match. It is the softest and most drapey cut of the fabric.

Bias tape Made from the bias cut of the fabric. It will sew around corners easily and is used to finish off a seam. You can buy packets ready-cut in different colors and widths.

Blind hem stitch Used for sewing a hem onto a garment. This stitch is usually done by hand but can be done by machine as well if the sewing machine has a blind hem stitch setting.

Bobbin A small spool that thread is wound onto. It is made out of plastic or metal. The bobbin goes into a bobbin case that is either part of the machine or separate and then put into the machine. Bobbins come in different "classes." A class 15 bobbin is used for many machines. Always check to see that you are using the right size for your machine.

Bobbin case This holds the bobbin in the sewing machine; it is located in a compartment underneath the needle plate.

Calendering A finishing technique that polishes fabric to a smooth, shiny, lustrous finish. Cotton fabrics sometimes have this finish.

Casing A folded-over edge of a garment or an added-on strip that creates a tunneled section through which you can pull elastic, a drawstring, a ribbon, or a curtain rod.

Catch stitch A hand stitch made by a cross-stitch formation. It is especially used for hems on the

bottom of bridal wear and costumes. Its purpose is to prevent your heel from being caught in the hem.

Center back The place on a pattern (usually indicated with an arrow) or garment indicating the exact vertical center back.

Center front The place on a pattern (usually indicated with an arrow) or garment indicating the exact vertical center front.

Clip A small cut no greater than the seam allowance into the fabric using the tips of your scissors.

Cord stop An ingenious little device that locks a drawstring in place.

Cross grain Also called the weft, these are the threads that run horizontally across the fabric from selvage to selvage. The term can be also be used for knits.

Cutting line The lines on a pattern to denote sizes. When choosing your cutting line, remember larger is better and pattern sizes do not reflect your clothing size.

Darts Used to take in excess fabric and create shape. On a pattern they look like triangles approximately 2 to 3 inches long. Typically, darts are found at the waist of a skirt or pants or on a blouse at the bustline.

Drape How a fabric hangs. Some fabrics are softer than others; therefore, they will hang in a more drapey way.

Ease The slightly extra allowance or fullness given to a pattern to allow for movement and sitting.

Fabric A cloth used as a covering. It is produced by knitting, weaving, braiding, or felting fibers.

Face A textile term for the right side of the fabric. Sometimes it is difficult to determine which side is the face, so it's helpful to mark it with tailor's chalk.

Facing piece A duplicate layer of fabric that is folded back to the inside so as to keep from having a raw edge showing.

Fasteners Snaps or metal hooks and eyes. They come in either black or silver and are available in many sizes. Fasteners are used to perform hidden closures on items such as skirts, bags, pillows, dresses, and blouses.

Feed dogs These are the pointed metal teeth that rise above the needle plate of your sewing machine; they are located directly under the presser foot. The feed dogs move the fabric through the machine forward, or backward if you press reverse. Sometimes they can move the fabric layer close to the teeth faster than the top layer. This will cause the bottom seam you're sewing to be slightly shorter than the top.

Fiber A small single strand before it is spun into yarn. For example, a fiber can be made from cotton, rayon, silk, and polyester.

Fold line The exact center of a pattern. When using the fold line of a fabric, make sure the fold is parallel to the selvage.

Fold line symbol This appears as a bracket symbol on a pattern, and indicates where a pattern should be placed on the fold of the fabric.

Fray check A colorless liquid that when applied in small amounts will keep fabric from fraying more. It's also better than nail polish to control panty hose runs.

Fuse tape (aka Stitch Witchery® and Jiffy Fuse®) A tape with glue on both sides that is activated by an iron. Particularly useful for securing fabric layers in place with a crisp finish when stitch marks are undesirable. Available by the yard or in prepackaged strips of varying widths.

Fusible A lightweight nonwoven or tricot (knit) that has glue on one side only. Used for skirt and pant waistbands, collars, lapels of jackets, and anywhere a stiff, crisp finish is needed. If ironed on well, it will survive washing and dry cleaning.

Grain The threads that are running along the length or the "warp" of the fabric.

Hem The fabric usually folded up into the inside of the garment and finished with a hemstitch. There are many different styles of hem finishes, such as dressmaker finish with hem tape, a sportswear finish using the sewing machine, and a rolled hem finish using a serger.

Hem tape A rayon tape that is sewn over the raw edge of the hem. It also can be purchased as an iron-on tape.

Hemline The finished bottom edge on skirts, dresses, jackets, and sleeves.

Knits These fabrics are made by a chain of interlooping yarns.

Lengthwise straight grain The warp threads that run up and down the fabric parallel to the selvage.

Lockstitch The basic stitch formation made by a sewing machine. The top thread from the needle forms a loop that "locks" with the bobbin thread loop to form each stitch.

Lycra A trademark for a man-made fiber, which is a synthetic rubber (spandex). It is used as a blend in many knits and wovens to create stretch and better "recovery."

Man-made fibers Formerly called synthetic fibers. This term includes all man-made textile fibers that are chemically engineered, such as polyester, acrylic, spandex, nylon, and Lycra.

Nap A surface produced by brushing up fibers in the cloth. Fabrics with nap will be a different shade of color depending on the direction you cut and sew it together. Fabrics with nap include velvet, corduroy, Ultrasuede, knitted panne, and polar fleece.

Needlepunch A nonwoven fabric. It is used in between quilts to create thickness. It is also used to create body in tote bags and used for the shoulder area of suit jackets.

Needle Metal spike with a sharp point and eye to pass thread. There are many different types of needles that are used for sewing. For example, "betweens or sharps" are used for regular hand sewing; crewel needles with a large eye are for embroidery thread; and beading needles are very thin to be able to thread on beads. Darners and tapestry needles are used for heavy mending and sewing thick home decor fabrics.

Notions A term used to describe sewing supplies, such as needles, thread, scissors, etc.

Notches Matching points that are marked on pattern pieces usually in a symbol of a triangle or U. Matching them helps sew the seams up correctly.

Overlock machine See **Serger**

Parallel Anything that measures at equal distance apart. For example, the straight grain on your pattern piece must be parallel to the selvage.

Pillow form A pillow without covering. It's usually made out of Dacron fiberfill and comes in different sizes.

Pins Pieces of steel with sharp points used to hold two pieces of fabric together when sewing. They come in many different sizes and varieties. It is best to buy dressmaker size 17 for all-purpose use. The nickel-plated stainless steel variety can easily be picked up by a magnet when you drop them on the floor. Some pins come with a plastic ball at the top; these are mostly used by quilters.

Piping or cording A narrow strip of fabric folded on the bias that sometimes has cording filler in it. It is used to trim a pillow edge or a garment.

Polyester A man-made fiber that is made from plastic. It resists wrinkles and will wash very easily. There are many fabrics that are blended with polyester.

Presser foot lifter A lever on the back of the sewing machine that lifts the presser foot up and down.

Rolled hem A very small hem made on an overlock machine. It can also be done by using a zigzag stitch on a sewing machine. It is seen on scarves and clothing as a finish to a raw edge.

Rotary cutter A cutting tool that must be used with a cutting mat. It is great for cutting straight strips

of fabric or tougher coverings such as leather.

Seam allowance The distance between the cut edge of the fabric and the sewing line.

Seam guide An adjustable attachment to the sewing machine that is placed along the side of the foot. It will give you straight seams as you sew if you keep your eye on the guide. The easiest style to use is a magnetic seam guide.

Seam line The line you sew your séam on.

Selvage The woven or printed edge on each side of the length of a fabric. It won't fray. Sometimes you can identify it by its little poke holes, contrast band, or fringe on both sides of the length of your fabric.

Serger and overlock machines Machines that sew an overlock stitch. Sergers are five-thread machines and overlocks are four-thread machines. Sergers sew an overlock stitch with a chainstitch alongside the overlock stitch. A serger will not replace a sewing machine since it cannot do a lockstitch. All sergers perform the function of cutting, trimming, and seaming fabric.

Sewing machine foot A plastic or metal attachment that holds your fabric under the needle. There are many different types of sewing feet you can attach to the presser foot. Sometimes your machine will come with extra feet. You should refer to the instruction book that comes with your machine. Each foot is designed to help you sew different treatments on your project. For example, a zipper foot is designed to help you get closer to the edge of what you're working on. You can use it to sew in the elastic to your skirt waist and add piping to your pillow. Of course it can be used to sew in a zipper, too.

Skirt hem marker A gadget that consists of a ruler and a bulb with marking powder that you can puff onto a garment while you are wearing it.

Slit An opening from the hem up on a skirt or dress. It is usually seen in a tapered silhouette because it allows you to walk more easily.

Snap fastenings These are metal grippers that come in black or silver and are available in several sizes. They are often used to snap close the very top corner of a dress or jacket. They can be used to close the envelope side of a pillow cover and are often used on baby clothes.

Stitch length The average length setting for most sewing is usually set at 2.5 to 3 on a home sewing machine and 4 or 5 for a machine basting.

Straight grain When you have pinned your pattern to the fabric and it is parallel to the selvage.

Tailor's chalk A small solid piece of chalk used for marking. It can be greasy like a crayon or dry and powdery. The dry clay chalk is best for your sewing projects since it won't leave a permanent mark.

Tailor's ham A basic tool for pressing that is a firm cushion and looks like a canned ham; sometimes also called a dressmaker's ham. It's used to press and shape darts, sleeves, and places which need a curved shape.

Tapestry A thick fabric that is woven in a floral design, story, or paisley. It is commonly used for wall hangings, bedspreads, upholstery, handbags, pillows, and coats.

Tencel A trademarked name for a new cellulose or rayon fiber.

Topstitch A decorative stitch that holds two seams together. It is usually ¼" or 1/8" away from a finished edge of fabric.

Thread A very thin twisted yarn and filament used for sewing. There are many types of thread used for many purposes. The most common for all types of sewing projects is the "all-purpose thread," which is cotton-wrapped, polyester core thread. Thread is made from yarn but yarn is not made from thread.

Tracing paper A special paper that comes in different colors that has a waxy, crayonlike finish. It is used to trace pattern markings such as darts or fit corrections.

Tracing wheel A tool with a handle used for transferring pattern markings to fabric by rolling it over tracing paper.

Twin needle Two needles mounted on one post that you can insert in the needle clamp of your sewing machine. By using two spools of thread on your sewing machine you can sew a double-needle jean effect on your project.

Velcro A trademarked name for tape that is a fastener. One side is fuzzy and the other side is prickly; when pressed together, they stick.

Viscose A term used in Europe for rayon. Rayon is a cellulose fiber made from wood pulp.

Warp The threads that run vertically or lengthwise in fabric. Warp threads are pulled tight since they need to be strong; they do not stretch.

Weft The horizontal threads in a woven fabric. Weft yarn can be softer and weaker than the warp.

Woven A textile structure made by interlacing warp threads with weft threads. The primary weaves are plain weave, twill, and satin.

Yard A term used to measure 36 inches of fabric length.

Yardstick A wooden or metal ruler that is marked in intervals of 1/8, ¼, ½, 1 to 36 inches, which is

one yard. This tool is helpful when laying pattern pieces on the straight grain and also to measure hemlines of bias-cut garments.

Yarn The assemblage of fibers or filaments, either natural or man-made, twisted together to form a continuous strand.

Zipper foot A sewing machine foot that is narrow so you can get closer to the side of what needs to be sewed. It can be used for sewing along the side of braiding, piping, and elastic as well as for putting in a zipper.

Appendix

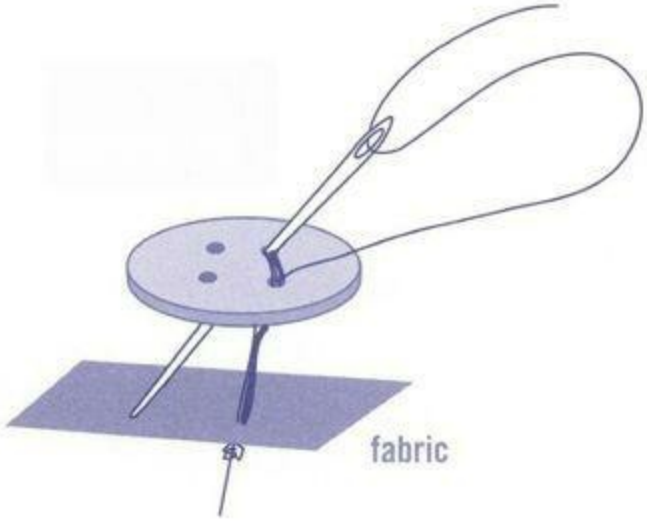
Sewing on a Button

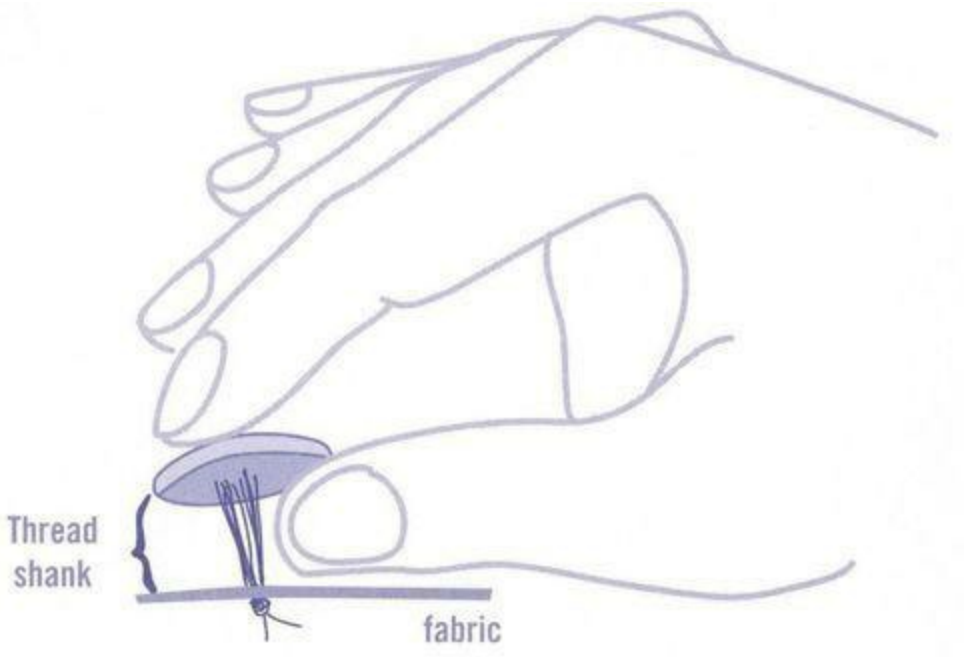
In order to sew on a button so that it won't come off, you should use a thicker thread. This kind of thread is called "button and carpet" thread. Button and carpet thread has a tendency to knot while you are sewing. In order to avoid that from happening, make sure to run the thread through some beeswax. You can buy beeswax in a removable grooved plastic holder at any sewing supply store. A flat button will have two or four holes in the center. When sewing flat buttons you need to create a shank with your sewing thread. The length of the shank depends on the thickness of the fabric that the button is being sewed onto. The shank will prevent the button from falling off.

Step 1

Mark with a pencil where you are going to sew your four-holed button. Make sure to knot your thread at the end. Start by sewing your thread from the wrong side of your fabric. Pull the thread all the way through until you reach the knot.

HOW TO SEW ON A BUTTON



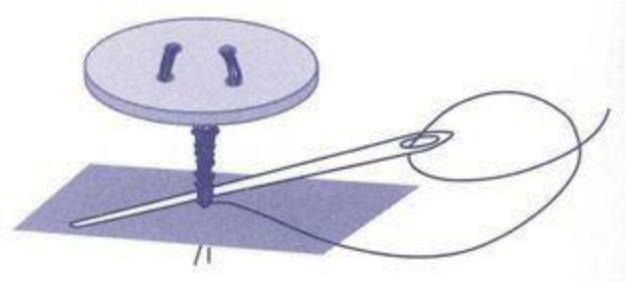


Step 2

Then slide your button onto your needle and thread, careful to keep the right side of the button facing you. Then push the needle through an adjacent hole and pull the thread tight, until you are holding the button ½ inch above your fabric. Continue back to the wrong side of the fabric while maintaining your ½ inch shank. Repeat this two or three times before continuing to the next pair of holes.

Step 3

As you go back down through the hole of the button toward the wrong side of the fabric, you will take your remaining thread and wrap it around and around those threads under the button to form your shank. When your shank feels stiff and secure, knot your thread on the wrong side of the fabric. Using this technique, you'll never lose a button.



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